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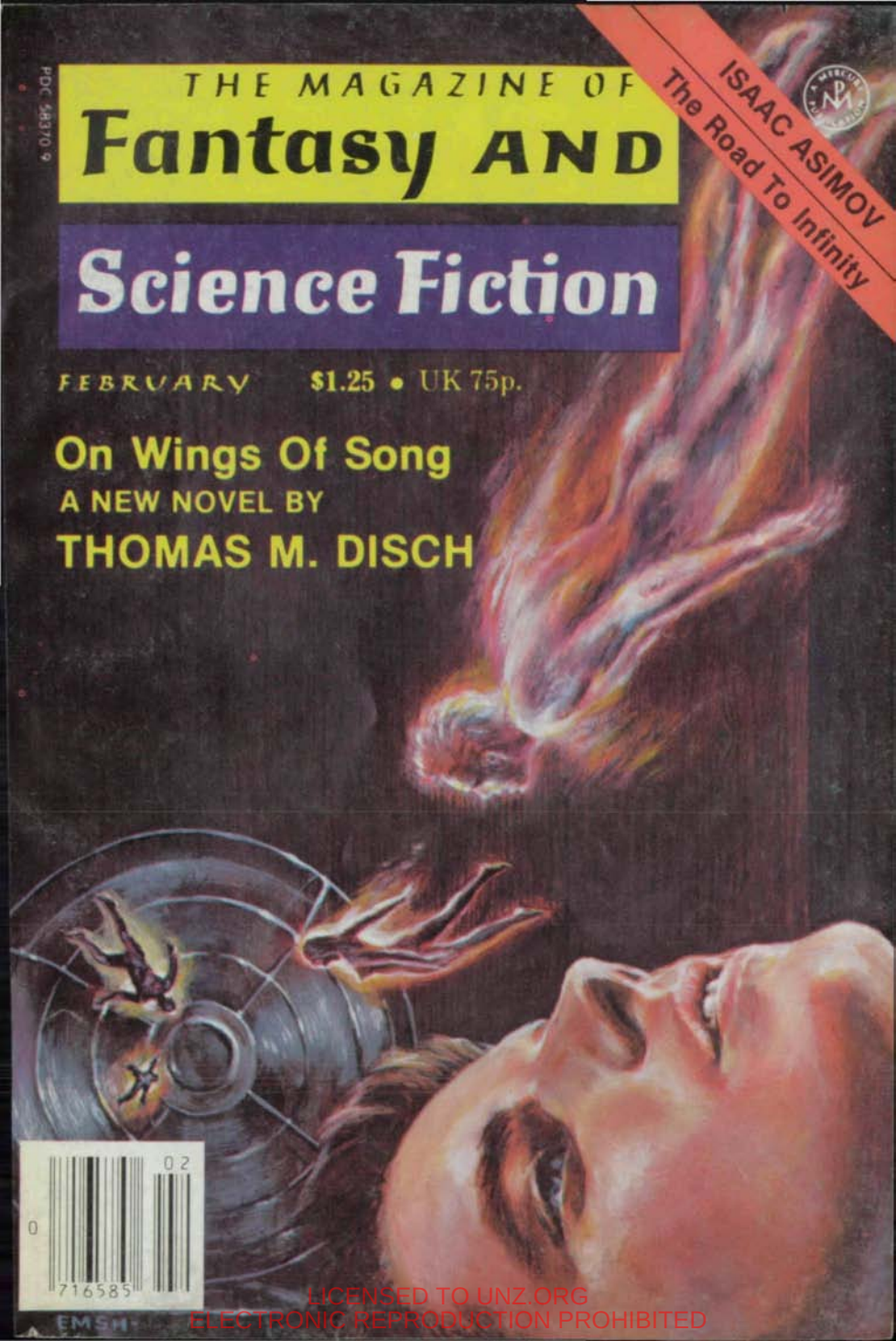

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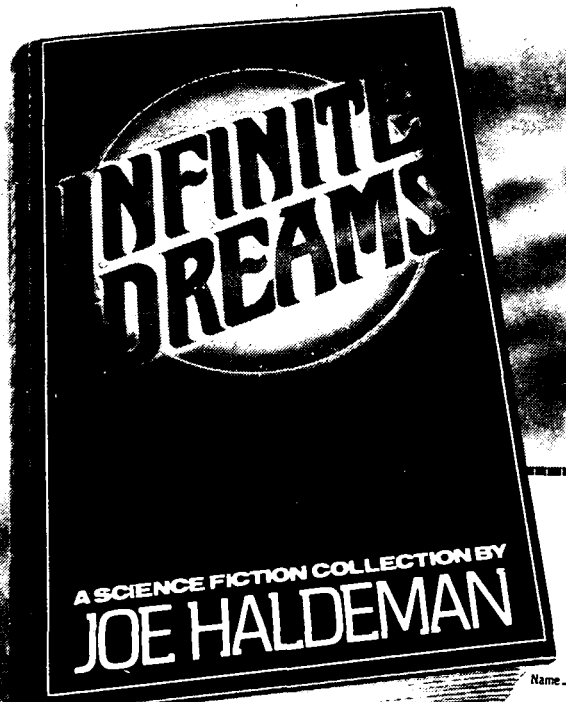

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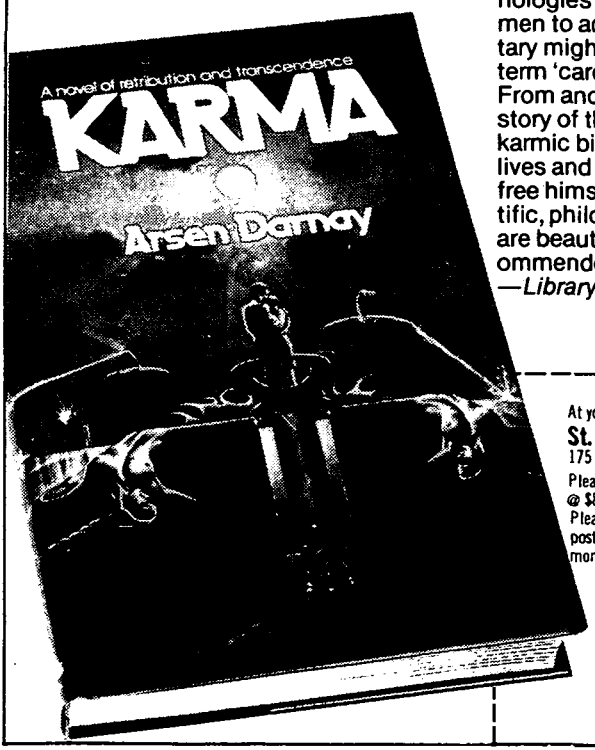

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Thomas M. Disch was born in 1940, began publishing sf in 1962. His short work has appeared in all the science fiction publications and many mainstream magazines, from Harpers *to* Playboy. *Among his sf novels are* The Genocides, Camp Concentration *and* 334 *(which grew from his F&SF story, "Problems of Creativeness"). He has lived recently in London and in New York, from which he writes: "current work in progress is a long mainstream novel,* Neighbors, *set in London in the years from 1834 to 1916..." This new novel is sf at its best, an honest and funny and tragic story about wonderfully real people operating in a U.S.A. of the future where out-of-body flight has become a reality.*

On Wings Of Song

(1st of 3 parts)

by THOMAS M. DISCH

When he was five Daniel Weinreb's mother disappeared. Though, like his father, he chose to regard this as a personal affront, he soon came to prefer the life they led without her. She'd been a weepy sort of girl, given to long disconnected speeches and spells of stifled hatred for Daniel's father, some of which always spilled over onto Daniel. She was sixteen when she'd married, twenty-one when she vanished with her two suitcases, the sound system, and the silver flatware in a service for eight that had been their wedding present from her husband's grandmother, Adah Weinreb.

After the bankruptcy proceedings were over — they'd been going on for a good while even before this — Daniel's father, Abraham Weinreb, D.D.S., took him a thousand miles away to live in the town of Amesville, Iowa, which needed a dentist because their last one had died. They lived in an apartment over the clinic, where Daniel had his own room, not just a couch that made up into a bed. There were backyards and streets to play in, trees to climb, and mountains of snow all winter long. Children seemed more important in Amesville, and there were more of them. Except for breakfast, he ate most of his meals in a big cafeteria downtown, and they were much better than his mother had cooked. In almost every way it was a better life.

Nevertheless, when he was cross or bored or sick in bed with a cold, he told himself that he missed her. It seemed monstrous that he, who was such a success ingratiating himself with the mothers of his friends, should not have a mother of his own. He felt set apart. But even this had its positive side: apart might be above. At times it seemed so. For his mother's absence was not the matter-of-fact missingness of death, but a mystery that Daniel was always pondering. There was an undeniable prestige in being the son of a

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mystery and associated with such high drama. The absent Milly Weinreb became Daniel's symbol of all the wider possibilities of the world beyond Amesville, which even at age six and then age seven seemed much diminished from the great city he'd lived in before.

He knew, vaguely, the reason she had gone away. At least the reason his father had given to Grandmother Weinreb over the phone on the day it happened. It was because she wanted to learn to fly. Flying was wrong, but a lot of people did it anyhow. Not Abraham Weinreb, though, and not any of the other people in Amesville either, because out here in Iowa it was against the law and people were concerned about it as part of the country's general decline.

Wrong, as it surely was, Daniel did like to imagine his mother, shrunk down to just the size of a grown-up finger, flying across the wide expanse of snowy fields that *he* had flown over in the plane, flying on tiny, golden, whirring wings (back in New York he'd seen what fairies looked like on TV, though of course that was an artist's conception), flying all the way to Iowa just to secretly visit him.

He would be playing, for instance with his Erector set, and then he'd get an impulse to turn off the fans in all three rooms, and open the flue of the chimney. He imagined his mother sitting on the sooty bricks up at the top, waiting for hours for him to let her in the house, and then at last coming down the opened flue and fluttering about. She would sit watching him while he played, proud and at the same time woebegone because there was no way she could talk to him or even let him know that she existed. Maybe she might bring her fairy friends to visit too ... a little troupe of them, perched on the bookshelves and the hanging plants, or clustered like moths about an electric light bulb.

And maybe they *were* there. Maybe it wasn't all imagination, since fairies are invisible. But if they were, then what he was doing was wrong, since people shouldn't let fairies into their houses. So he decided it was just himself, making up the story in his mind.

When he was nine Daniel Weinreb's mother reappeared. She had the good sense to telephone first, and since it was a Saturday when the girl was off and Daniel was handling the switchboard, he was the first to talk to her.

He answered the phone the way he always did, with, "Good morning, Amesville Medical Arts Group."

An operator said there was a collect call from New York for Abraham Weinreb.

"I'm sorry," Daniel recited, "but he can't come to the phone now. He's with a patient. Could I take a message?"

The operator conferred with another voice Daniel could barely make out, a voice like the voice on a record when the speakers are off and someone else is listening with earphones.

When the operator asked him who he was, somehow he knew it must be

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his mother who was phoning. He answered that he was Abraham Weinreb's son. Another shorter conference ensued, and the operator asked if *he* would accept the call.

He said he would.

"Danny? Danny, is that you, love?" said a whinier voice than the operator's.

He wanted to say that no one ever called him Danny, but that seemed unfriendly. He limited himself to an equivocal *Uh.*

"This is your mother, Danny."

"Oh. Mother. Hi." She still didn't say anything. It was up to him entirely. "How are you?"

She laughed and that seemed to deepen her voice. "Oh, I could be worse." She paused and added, "But not a lot. Where is your father, Danny? Can I talk to him?"

"He's doing a filling."

"Does he know I'm calling?"

"No, not yet."

"Well, would you *tell* him? Tell him it's Milly calling from New York."

He weighed the name on his tongue: "Milly."

"Right. Milly. Short for ... do you know?"

He thought. "Millicent?"

"God almighty no. Mildred — isn't that bad enough? Doesn't he *ever* talk about me?"

He wasn't trying to avoid her question. It was just that his own seemed so much more important: "Are you coming *here?*"

"I don't know. It depends for one thing on whether Abe sends me the money. Do *you* want me to?"

Even though he wasn't sure, it seemed required of him to say that, yes, he did. But he'd hesitated, noticeably, so most of the credit for saying the right thing was lost.

"Danny, why don't you go *tell* him I'm on the phone?" Her voice was whiney again.

Daniel obeyed. As he'd known he would be, his father was annoyed when Daniel appeared in the doorway. For a while he just stood there. He didn't want to say who it was out loud in front of the patient in the chair, a fat farmwoman who was getting a crown put on a left-upper canine. He said, "There's a phone call from New York."

His father still looked daggers. Did he understand?

"A woman," Daniel added significantly. "She's calling collect."

"You know better than to interrupt me, Daniel. Tell her to wait."

He went back to the switchboard. Another call was coming in. He put it on hold quickly, then said to his mother, "I told him. He said to wait. He really can't stop in the middle."

"Well, then I'll wait."

"There's another call. I have to put you on hold."

She laughed again. It was a pleasant laugh. He foresaw, though not in so many words, the necessity of keeping her in a good humor. Assuming that she came to Amesville. So, almost deliberately, he added a fond P.S.: "Gee, Mom, I hope it works out so you can come and live with us." He put her on hold before she could reply.

***

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Because the plane had come from New York, there was a long wait for the passengers and their luggage to be cleared through the State Police Inspection Station. Daniel thought that several of the women who came through the white formica doors might be his mother, but when she finally did appear, all frazzled and frayed, the very last passenger to be processed, there was no mistaking her. She wasn't the mother he'd imagined over the years, but she was undoubtedly the one he'd tried and never quite managed to forget.

She was pretty but in the direction of vulnerability rather than of zest and health, with big tired brown eyes, and a tangled mass of horsetail hair that hung down over her shoulders as if it were meant to be a decoration. Her clothes were plain and pleasant but not warm enough for Iowa in the middle of October. She was no taller than an average eighth-grader, and except for big, bra-ed-up breasts, no more flesh-ed-out than the people you saw in advertisements for religion on TV. She'd let her nails grow weirdly long and she fluttered her fingers when she talked so you were always noticing. One arm was covered with dozens of bracelets of metal and plastic and wood that clinked and jangled all the time. To Daniel she seemed as bizarre as an exotic breed of dog, the kind that no one ever owns and you only see in books. People in Amesville would stare at her. The other people in the airport restaurant already were.

She was eating her hamburger with a knife and fork. Maybe (Daniel theorized) her long fingernails prevented her from picking it up by the bun. The fingernails were truly amazing, a spectacle. Even while she ate she never stopped talking, though nothing that she said was very informative. Obviously she was trying to make a good impression, on Daniel as well as his father. Just as obviously she was pissed off with the inspection she'd gone through. The police had confiscated a transistor radio and four cartons of cigarettes she hadn't had the cash to pay the Iowa Stamp Tax on. Daniel's father was able to get the cigarettes back for her but not the radio since it received stations in the prohibited frequency ranges.

In the car on the way back to Amesville his mother smoked and chattered and made lots of nervous, not very funny jokes. She admired everything she saw in a tone of syrupy earnestness, as though Daniel and his father were personally responsible and must be praised for the whole of Iowa, the stubble of cornstalks in the fields, the barns and silos, the light and the air. Then she'd forget herself for a moment, and you could tell she really didn't mean a word of it. She seemed afraid.

Next morning was Saturday and Daniel had to be up at six a.m. to attend a Young Iowa Rally in Otto Hassler Park. By the time he was back home, at noon, Milly had been shaped up into a fair approximation of an Amesville housewife. Except for her undersize stature she might have stepped right out of a lady's clothing dis-

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play in Burns and McCauley's window: a neat practical green blouse speckled with neat practical white daisies, a knee-length skirt with wavy three-inch horizontal bands of violet and lime, with matching heavy-duty hose. Her fingernails were clipped to an ordinary length, and her hair was braided and wound around into a kind of cap like Daniel's fourth-grade teacher's (he was in fifth grade now), Mrs. Boismortier. She was wearing just one of yesterday's bracelets, a plastic one matching the green in her skirt.

"Well?" she asked him, striking a pose that made her look more than ever like a plaster manikin.

He felt dismayed all over again. His hamstrings were trembly from the calisthenics in the park, and he collapsed on the sofa hoping to cover his reaction with a show of exhaustion.

"It's that bad?"

"No, I was only...." He decided to be honest and then decided against it. "I liked you the way you were." Which was half the truth.

"Aren't you the proper little gentleman!" She laughed.

"Really."

"It's sweet of you to say so, dear heart, but Abe made it quite clear that the old me just would not do. And he's right, it wouldn't. I can be realistic. So —" She struck another shop-window pose, arms lifted in a vaguely defensive gesture. "— what I want to know is: will the new me do?"

He laughed. "For sure, for sure."

"Seriously," she insisted, in a tone he could not believe was at all serious. It was as though just by doing any ordinary thing she parodied it, whether she wanted to or not.

He tried to consider her freshly, as though he'd never seen her the way she'd arrived. "As far as what you're wearing and all, you look just fine. But that won't make you...." He blushed. "...invisible. I mean...."

"Yes?" She crinkled her painted eyebrows.

"I mean, people are curious, especially about Easterners. Already this morning kids had heard and they were asking me."

"What about, exactly?"

"Oh, what you look like, how you talk. They see things on television and they think they're true."

"And what did you tell them?"

"I said they could wait and see for themselves."

"Well, don't worry, Danny — when they do see me I'll look so ordinary they'll lose all their faith in TV. I didn't come here without a good idea of what I'd be getting into. We've got TV in the East, you know, and the Farm Belt gets its share of attention."

"They say we're very conformist, don't they?"

"Yes, that's certainly one thing they say."

"So why did you want to come here? I mean, aside from us."

"Why? I want a nice, comfortable, safe, prosperous life, and if conformity's the price I've got to pay, so be it. Wherever you are, you know, you're conforming to something."

She held out her hands in front of her, as though considering the pared-down nails. When she started talking

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again, it was in a tone of unquestionable seriousness. "Last night I told your father I'd go out and get a job to help him take up his indenture a little faster. It would actually be a joy for me to work. But he said, no, that wouldn't look right. That's my job, looking right. So I'll be a nice little homebody and crochet the world's largest potholder. Or *whatever* homebodies do here. I'll do it and, by damn, I'll look right!"

She plunked down in an armchair and lit a cigarette. Daniel wondered if she knew that most Amesville housewives didn't smoke, and especially not in public. And then he thought: being with him wasn't the same as being in public. He was her son!

"Mother ... could I ask you a question?"

"Certainly, so long as I don't have to answer it."

"Can you fly?"

"No." She inhaled shallowly and let the smoke spill out of her open mouth. "No, I tried to but I never had the knack. Some people never do learn, no matter how hard they try."

"But you wanted to."

"Only a fool would deny wanting to. I *knew* people who flew, and from the way they talked about it...." She rolled back her eyes and pouted her bright red lips, as if to say, *Pure heaven!*

"At school there was a special lecture in the gym last year, an authority from the government, and *he* said it's all in your head. You just *think* you're flying but it's a kind of dream."

"That's propaganda. *They* don't believe it. If they did they wouldn't be so afraid of fairies. There wouldn't be fans whirling everywhere you went."

"It's real then?"

"As real as the two of us sitting here. Does that answer your question?"

"Yeah. I guess so." He decided to wait till later on to ask what her friends had said it felt like.

"Good. Then remember this: you must never, never talk about this to anyone else. I don't even want you to talk about it again to me. Anything to do with flying, anything at all. Has your father explained to you about sex?"

Daniel nodded.

"About fucking?"

"Uh ... here in Iowa ... you don't ever...."

"You don't talk about it, right?"

"Well, kids don't talk about it with grown-ups."

"Flying's just the same. We don't talk about it. Ever. Except to say that it's very, very wrong and that people wicked enough to do it deserve every terrible thing that happens to them."

"Is that what you believe?"

"Never mind 'believe.' What I'm *saying* now is the official under-god truth. Flying is wrong. Say that."

"Flying is wrong."

She pushed herself up out of the armchair and came over and kissed him on the cheek. "You and I," she said with a wink, "are two of a kind. And we're going to get along."

At the age of eleven Daniel developed a passion for ghosts — also vam-

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pires, werewolves, mutated insects, and alien invaders. At the same time and mostly because he shared this appetite for the monstrous, he fell in love with Eugene Mueller, the younger son of Roy Mueller, a farm equipment dealer who'd been the mayor of Amesville until just two years ago. The Muellers lived in the biggest and (they said) oldest house on Amesville's prestigious Linden Drive. A total of five of the town's mayors and police chiefs had lived in that house, and three of those five had been Muellers. In the attic of the Mueller's house, among many other forms of junk, were a great many boxes of old books, mostly unreadable relics of the irrelevant past — books about dieting and being successful, the multivolume memoirs of a dead president, textbooks for French, home ec, accounting, and yard upon yard of *Reader's Digest Condensed Books.* Buried, however, in the deepest level of these cast-off ideas, Eugene Mueller had discovered an entire carton filled with paperback collections of supernatural tales, tales of an artfulness and awfulness surpassing any known to him from the oral traditions of summer camp and the *Register* delivery office.

Eugene would sneak single volumes down to his room hidden in his underwear and read them there by candlelight late at night. The books were like ghosts themselves, their margins crumbling to dust at his fingers' touch. He'd read each story once quickly and, if it was one he liked, a second time, lingeringly. Then, with its topic fresh in his memory, he would retell the story to the news carriers at the *Register* office, while they waited for the truck to arrive with the papers. Sometimes he would draw it out over several days to increase the suspense.

Daniel also had a paper route, though not as lucrative a one as the ex-mayor's son. He listened to Eugene Mueller's stories with the ravished reverence of a disciple. They — and their presumed author — became an emotional necessity to him. Months ago he'd exhausted the school library's meager resources — a ragged copy of thirteen tales by Poe and bowdlerized editions of *Frankenstein* and *The War of the Worlds.* Once he'd bicycled to Fort Dodge and back, forty miles each way, to see a double feature of old black-and-white horror movies. It was terrible, loving something so inaccessible, and all the more wonderful, therefore, when the long drought came to an end. Even when Eugene confessed, privately, to having practiced on his friend's credulity and had shown him his store of treasures, even then Daniel went on thinking of him as a superior person, set apart from other seventh and eighth graders, possibly even a genius.

Daniel became a frequent overnight guest at the Mueller home. He ate with Eugene's family at their dinner table, even times when his father was there. With all of them Daniel was charming, but he only came alive when he was alone with Eugene — either in the attic, reading and creating their own artless Grand Guignol, or in Eugene's room, playing with the great arsenal of his toys and games.

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In his own way he was as bad — that is, as good — a social climber as his mother.

Three days before Daniel got his certificate for passing seventh grade, the Weinrebs moved to their new home on Chickasaw Avenue, which was reckoned (by those who lived there) to be nearly as nice a neighborhood as Linden Drive. It was a smallish gray clapboard ranch-style house with two bedrooms. Inevitably the second bedroom fell to the twins, Aurelia and Cecelia, and Daniel was relegated to the room in the basement. Despite its gloom and the damp cinder-block walls he decided it was to be preferred to the twins' room, being larger and so private that it could boast its own entrance onto the driveway.

The last owner of the house had tried to make ends meet (and failed, apparently) by renting the basement room to a family of Italian refugees. Think of it: four people living in this one room, with two basement windows for light, and a sink with only a cold water tap!

Daniel kept the laminated nameplate with their name on it: Bosola. Often late at night, alone in his room, he tried to imagine the sort of life the Bosolas had led hemmed in by these four gray walls. His mother said they'd probably been happier, which was her way of ignoring any otherwise incontrovertible misery. No one in the neighborhood knew what had become of them. Maybe they were still in Amesville. A lot of Italians lived in trailer courts on the outskirts of town and worked for Ralston-Purina.

Daniel's father was a refugee too, though his case was different from most. His mother had been American, his father a native-born Israeli. He'd grown up on a kibbutz four miles from the Syrian border and had gone to the university in Tel Aviv, majoring in chemistry. When he was twenty his maternal grandparents offered to put him through dental school if he would come and live with them in Queens. A providential kindness, for two weeks after he left for the States the rockets were launched that destroyed most of Tel Aviv. On his twenty-first birthday he had the choice of which country's citizen he wanted to be. At that point it couldn't really be called a choice. He pledged his allegiance to the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stood, and changed his name from Shazar to Weinreb in deference to his grandfather and the bill he was footing at N.Y.U. He got through dental school and joined the elder Weinreb's faltering practice in Elmhurst, which went on faltering for twelve more years. The one action in his whole life he had seemed to undertake of his own spontaneous and uncoerced will was at age thirty-nine to marry sixteen-year-old Milly Baer, who had come to him with an impacted wisdom tooth. As Milly would often later insist, in her fits of reminiscence, even that choice had not been, in the final analysis, his.

Daniel was never able to satisfactorily account for the fact that he didn't like his father. Because he wasn't as important or as well-to-do as

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Roy Mueller, for instance? No, for Daniel's feeling, or lack of it, went back before the time he'd become aware of his father's limitations in these respects. Because he was, after all, a refugee? Specifically, a Jewish refugee? No, for, if anything, he wasn't sufficiently a Jewish refugee. Daniel was still young enough to take a romantic view of hardship, and to his way of thinking the Bosolas (as he imagined them) were a much better, more heroic sort than any Weinrebs whatsoever. Then why?

Because — and this possibly was the real reason, or one of them — he sensed that his father, like every other father, expected him and, what was worse, wanted him to follow the same career that he'd been sinking in all through his life. He wanted Daniel to become a dentist.

It wasn't enough for Daniel to insist that *he* didn't want to be one. He had to find something he *did* want to be. And he couldn't. Not that it made a great deal of difference, yet. He was young, he had time. But, even so — he didn't like thinking about it.

The house of Mrs. Boismortier, his old fourth-grade teacher, was the very last stop on Daniel's route. She was an older woman, forty or fifty years old, and fat, like a lot of other women her age in Amesville. Her name was pronounced Boys-More-Teer. No one that Daniel had ever talked to could remember a time when there had been a Mr. Boismortier.

Daniel remembered her as a careful rather than an inspired teacher, content to return eternally to the verities of spelling, grammar, and long division rather than to call down the lightning of a new idea. She would never read them stories, for instance, or talk about things from her own life. Her only livelier moments were on Fridays when for an hour at the end of the day she led her class in singing. They always started with the National Anthem and ended with "Song of Iowa." Daniel's three favorite songs in their songbook had been "Santa Lucia," "Old Black Joe," and "Anchors Aweigh." Most teachers shied away from teaching music in the Friday free periods, because it was controversial, but Mrs. Boismortier, whenever the subject came up — at a PTA meeting or even in class discussions — simply declared that any country whose schoolchildren could not do justice to their own National Anthem was a country in deep trouble, and how could you argue with that? But for all her talk of God and Country, it was obvious to the children in her classes that she taught them singing because she enjoyed it herself. In every song her voice was loudest and loveliest, and, no matter what kind of singer you might be yourself, it was a pleasure to sing along because it was her voice you heard, not your own.

Nevertheless, over the years Mrs. Boismortier had made enemies by insisting on teaching music, especially among Undergoders, who were very strong in this part of Iowa and very outspoken and sure of themselves. If you could believe the *Register*, they practically ran Iowa, and they'd been

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even more powerful in the days just after the defeat of the national Anti-Flight Amendment, when they were able to get the state legislature to pass a law prohibiting all secular musical performances, live or recorded. Three days after Governor Brewster vetoed this law, his only daughter was shot at; and though it was never proven that her would-be killer had been an Undergoder, the crime did turn a lot of sympathizers away. Those days were over, and the worst that Mrs. Boismortier had to worry about now was the occasional broken window or dead cat strung up on her front porch. Once when Daniel was delivering her paper, he found a two-inch hole drilled into the middle of the front door. At first he supposed it was for the paper, and then he realized it was meant to be a fairy-hole. As a sign of his solidarity Daniel made a tight cylinder of the paper and forced it into the hole, as if that were what it was there for. At school the next day, Mrs. Boismortier went out of her way to thank him, and instead of repairing the hole she enlarged it and covered it with a metal plate that could be slipped to the side, thereby making it officially a slot for the *Register*.

That had been the beginning of the special relationship between Daniel and Mrs. Boismortier. Often on the coldest winter nights she would waylay him when he brought the paper and have him come into her living room for a hot cup of something she made from corn starch. "Embargo cocoa" she called it. There were either books or pictures on all the walls, including a very careful watercolor of the First Baptist Church and a store next to it (where there wasn't any now) called A & P. Also, right in plain sight, with shelves of records above it up to the ceiling, was a stereo phonograph. There wasn't anything illegal about that, strictly speaking, but most people who had records — the Muellers, for instance — kept them out of sight and, usually, locked up. It seemed very gutsy, considering the way she was harassed in general.

As his fingers and ears grew warmer and started tingling, Mrs. Boismortier would ask him questions. Somehow she'd learned that he liked ghost stories, and she would recommend titles that he could ask his mother to take out for him from the adult section of the library. Sometimes these were a little too plodding and high-toned for his taste, but twice, at least, she hit the nail on the head. She almost never talked about herself, which seemed unusual in someone basically so talkative.

Gradually, as he began to realize that despite her reticence and her fat incapable body, Mrs. Boismortier was a definite human being, Daniel began to grow curious. Mostly about the music. He knew that music was not something you talked about with other people, but it was hard not to think about, especially with those shelves of records looming down, like a microfilm library of all the sins in the world. Not that music was wrong, exactly. But where there's smoke, as they say. After all, it was music that helped people fly. Not listening to music, of course, but doing it. And anything as-

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sociated with flying was irresistibly interesting.

And so, one snowy afternoon in November, after he'd accepted his cup of embargo cocoa, he screwed up his courage and asked if he might be allowed to hear one of her records.

"Why, surely, Daniel, what record would you like to hear?"

The only pieces of music he knew by name were the songs in the school's songbook. He was certain, just because they *were* in the songbook, that those weren't the kinds of music that peopled used to fly.

"I don't know," he admitted. "Something that *you* like."

"Well, here's something I listened to last night, and it seemed quite splendid, though it may not appeal to you at all. A string quartet, by Mozart." Ever so tenderly, as if the record were a living thing, she slipped it from its cardboard sleeve and placed it on the turntable.

He braced his mind against some unimaginable shock, but the sounds that issued from the speakers were dull and innocuous — wheezings and whining, groanings and grindings that continued interminably without getting anywhere. Once or twice out of the murk he could hear melodies begin to get started, but then they'd sink back into the basic diddle-diddle-diddle of the thing before you could start to enjoy them. On and on and on, sometimes faster, sometimes slower, but all of a dullness and drabness uniform as housepaint. Even so, you couldn't just say thank you, that was enough, not while Mrs. Boismortier was swaying her head back and forth and smiling in a faraway way, as if this really were some incredible mystic revelation. So he stared at the record revolving on the turntable and sweated it out to the end. Then he thanked Mrs. Boismortier and trudged home through the snow feeling betrayed, disillusioned and amazed.

That *couldn't* be all there was to it. It just could not. She was hiding something. There was a secret.

That winter, in the first week of the new year, there was a national crisis when some unidentified terrorists blew up the Alaska pipeline. Despite precautions this had happened many times before, and there was supposed to be a foolproof system for shutting down the flow, patching up the damage, and getting back to normal before there were major repercussions. This time, though, several miles of line were taken out by bombs that went off at neat six-hundred-yard intervals. According to the *Register,* this meant that the bombs must have traveled *inside* the giant pipes, with the oil, and there were diagrams showing why this was impossible. Fairies were blamed, but so were, variously, Iran, Panama, several sorts of terrorists.

How this affected Iowa was very simple: there was no fuel. Every conceivable form of leverage and legal blackmail was used to wangle concessions for the Farm Belt states, but the fuel really wasn't there. Now they were going to have a taste of what winter rationing was like for the unfortunates who lived in less affluent parts of the country.

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The taste was bitter. The winter's cold crept into stores and schools and houses, into the food you ate and the water you bathed in, into your every bone and thought. The Weinrebs camped in their own living room and kitchen to squeeze as much warmth as possible from the remaining liters of fuel in the tank. After eight p.m. there was no electricity, and so you couldn't even read or watch TV to make the freezing hours pass a little faster. Daniel would sit with his parents in the dark and silent room, unmoving, unable to sleep, hoarding the warmth of his sweaters and blankets. The boredom became a worse torment than the cold. Nine-thirty was bedtime. He slept between his two sisters and began to smell of their piss.

Sometimes he would be allowed to visit Eugene, and if he were lucky, he might be asked to spend the night. The Mueller's house was noticeably warmer. For one thing, they had a fireplace, and through the early evening there would always be a fire going. They used the books in the attic as fuel (with Daniel's help Eugene was able to spirit away their horror stories), as well as unwanted sticks of furniture. Mr. Mueller also had a source (Daniel suspected) of bootleg fuel.

The *Register* had temporarily suspended publication for the duration of the crisis, so that at least he didn't have to freeze his ass off delivering papers. The world seemed different without news. Daniel hadn't supposed, till now, that he was interested in the official world represented by the *Register,* the world of strikes and settlements, debates and issues, Republicans and Democrats. He would have been hard-pressed to say what most of the headlines he'd looked at were about, but now that there were none, it was as though civilization had ground to a halt, like some old Chevy that no one could get started, as though winter had overtaken not only nature but history as well.

In March, with life beginning to look almost ordinary again, Daniel's father came down with pneumonia. The Iowa winters had always been hard for him. He got through them by pumping himself full of antihistamines. Finally, like a tooth that's been drilled and filled until there's nothing left of it, his health collapsed. He'd gone into the office feverish and had to let his nurse finish the draining of a root canal when he couldn't keep his hands from shaking. Against her employer's protests the nurse called in Dr. Caskey from down the hall. Caskey, after examining his colleague, wrote out an admission order to the hospital in Fort Dodge.

Through the whole crisis hospitals were the one place you could be warm, and Milly, Daniel and the twins would have basked at Abraham's bedside every day from the start of visiting hours till the nurses threw them out — if only Fort Dodge hadn't been so far away. As it was, they wouldn't have seen him at all if it hadn't been for Roy Mueller, who drove in to Fort Dodge in his pickup two or three times a week and always had room for either Daniel or Milly, though not for both at once.

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There wasn't a great deal of communication at the best of times between Daniel and his father. Abraham Weinreb was fifty-two now, and he looked, with his fringe of gray hair and the loose flesh wrinkling on his face, like someone living on Social Security. Since coming to the hospital, he had developed a strain of lachrymose seriousness that made Daniel more than usually uneasy when they were together. One windy Saturday during the first real thaw of the year Abraham took a New Testament from the metal night table by his bed and asked Daniel to read aloud to him from the beginning of John. All the while he read, Daniel kept worrying whether his father were developing into some kind of religious fanatic, and when he told Milly about it that night, she was even more alarmed. They were both certain he was dying.

The Weinrebs were churchgoers as a matter of course. No one who earned more than a certain amount of money in Amesville was so impolitic as not to be. But they went to the Congregationalist Church, which was generally recognized as the most lukewarm and temporizing of the town's churches. The Congregationalist God was the God commemorated on the coins and dollar bills that went into the collection baskets, a God who made no other demands of his worshipers than that they waste a certain amount of cash and time each Sunday on his behalf. One could have met a better class of people by being Episcopalian, but then one stood the risk of being snubbed. The real aristocracy of Iowa, the farmers, were Undergoders — Lutherans, Baptists, Methodists — but it was impossible to pretend to be an Undergoder since it involved giving up almost anything you might enjoy — not just music, but TV and most books and even talking with anyone who wasn't another Undergoder. Besides, the farmers lumped all the townspeople together anyhow with the great unregenerate mass of agitators, middlemen, and the unemployed that comprised the rest of the country, so it didn't do much good even for those who tried to pretend.

Milly and Daniel needn't have worried. Abraham did not become an Undergoder, and after a few failed dialogues he didn't even try to talk about whatever it was that had got him going on the subject of Jesus. The only difference in his behavior after he came back from Fort Dodge was that he seemed to have lost some of his old confidence and his appetite for the jokes and trivia of day-to-day life that had kept conversation alive at the dinner table. It was as though his recent brush with death had made every ordinary food taste rotten to him.

Daniel avoided him more than ever. His father seemed not to notice — or not to mind.

The *Register* never did go back into business, even after the pipeline was functional and the President had assured the whole country that the emergency was over. Its circulation had been dwindling for a long time, advertising revenues were down to a record low, and even at the current newsstand

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price of one buck ($5.50 a week for subscribers) it could no longer survive. Furthermore, it had become increasingly easy anywhere in Iowa to get copies of the *Star-Tribune.* Though its editorials were outspokenly against flying *per se,* the *Star-Tribune* ran ads for flight apparatus, and its news stories often shed a well-nigh roseate light on various self-confessed fairies, especially in the media. The ads by themselves were enough to make the Minneapolis paper illegal in Iowa, but the police didn't seem to be interested in cracking down on the two taverns that sold smuggled-in copies, despite recurrent anonymous denunciations (phoned in by *Register* delivery boys) to the Amesville sheriff's office and the state police as well. Apparently the paper's seventy-cent cover price included a percentage for payoffs.

The demise of the *Register* came at a bad time for Daniel. Over and above his father's theoretical objections to allowances for teen-agers (which Daniel had lately become), the money just wasn't there. Though he had at last taken up his indentures and was no longer in debt to the county, Abraham Weinreb did have to meet stiff monthly payments on the house, and now there was the hospital's bill to settle. What's more, he was under strict orders to cut back on his workload. So there was significantly less money coming in.

Daniel stewed over the dilemma for the better part of a month, while the daily demands of friendship and ostentation ate up the little money he'd saved against the day, next July, when Young Iowa was to go camping in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Then he took the initiative and went to speak to Heinie Youngermann at the Sportsman's Rendezvous, one of the taverns that sold the *Star-Tribune.* Not only was Daniel able to secure a route for himself, but he was put in charge of the entire delivery operation (with a two per cent rake-off). Admittedly, there weren't as many subscribers as there had been for the above-board *Register,* but the per-copy profit was as good, and by making each route a little larger, each of the boys stood to earn as much as he used to, while Daniel, with that beautiful two per cent, was pulling down a weekly income of nearly fifty dollars, which was as much as a lot of grown-ups got at full-time jobs. His friend Eugene Mueller continued to deliver in the Linden Drive section of town, virtually guaranteeing that the police would not interfere.

Besides the basic good news of being flush, it was spring. Lawns were turning green before the rains had washed away the last impacted traces of the snow. The main street was alive with pushcarts and bicycles. Suddenly it was Central Daylight Time and the sun stayed up till seven-thirty. Milly's face went from sallow to rosy to tan from her stints of backyard gardening. She acted happier than he could ever remember. Even the twins seemed interesting and agreeable now that he no longer had to be their bed warmer. They'd learned to talk. In (as Daniel had quipped) a manner of speaking. Buds swelled on branches, clouds scudded through the sky, robins appeared

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out of nowhere. It truly was spring.

One Sunday, for the sheer hell of it, Daniel decided to ride his bicycle out along County Road B to where a school friend of his lived, Geraldine McCarthy, in the village of Unity, a round trip of fourteen miles. In the fields on either side of the road the new cornplants were springing up through the black Iowa soil. The cool air rippled through his cotton shirt as if on purpose to share its growing excitement.

Halfway to Unity he stopped pedaling, overcome with a sense that he was an incredibly important person. The future, which usually he never gave much thought to, became as intensely real as the sky overhead, which was sliced in two neat pieces by the vapor trail of a jet. The feeling became so powerful it almost got frightening. He knew, with an absoluteness of knowing that he could never doubt for many years, that someday the whole world would know who he was and honor him. How and why remained a mystery.

After the vision had departed, he lay down in the young weeds by the side of the road and watched the clouds massing at the horizon. How strange, how fortunate, and how unlikely to be Daniel Weinreb, in this small town in Iowa, and to have such splendors in store.

General Roberta Donnelly, the Republican candidate for President, was going to be giving a major speech at a Fight Against Flight Rally in Minneapolis, according to the *Star-Tribune*, and Daniel and Eugene decided to go and hear her and even get her autograph if they could. They'd have a real adventure for a change instead of just going off into the Muellers' attic or the Weinreb's basement and acting one out. In any case they were getting too old for that sort of thing. Eugene was fifteen, Daniel fourteen (though of the two he seemed the older, being so much hairier everywhere it counted).

There was no way they could let their parents know what they were planning. Setting off for Des Moines on their own would have been gently discouraged and maybe eventually allowed, but Minneapolis was as unthinkable a destination as Peking or Las Vegas. Never mind that the reason for their going there was to see General Donnelly, as true-blue and red-blooded a motive as any Undergoder could have asked for. For all right-thinking Iowans the Twin Cities were Sodom and Gomorrah. (On the other hand, as right-thinking Minnesotans liked to point out, what had happened there would have happened in Iowa too, if only six per cent more voters had swung the other way.) It was scary — but also, for that very reason, exciting — to think of going across the border, and there comes a time in your life when you have to do something that is scary in this particular way. No one else would ever need to know about it, except Jerry Larsen, who had agreed to take over both their routes for the two afternoons they meant to be gone.

Having told their parents they were going camping and having skillfully avoided saying where, they rode their

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bikes north as far as U.S. 18, where they folded them up and hid them inside a storm culvert under the road. They struck luck with their very first ride, an empty semi returning to Albert Lea. It smelled of pigshit, even up in the cab with the driver. They became so friendly talking with the driver that they considered changing their plans and asking him to say that they were all together, but that seemed an unnecessary complication. When they got to the border, Eugene needed only to mention his father's name to the Customs Inspector and they were across.

The unspoken understanding was that they were on their way to see the latest double-feature at the Star-Lite Drive-In outside of Albert Lea. Flying was far from being the only forbidden fruit available in Minnesota. Pornography was also an attraction, and — in the eyes of most Iowans, a much more real one. (It was chiefly on account of its ads for border drive-ins that the *Star-Tribune* was banned in neighboring Farm Belt states.) Eugene and Daniel were doubtless a little young to be sneaking across the border to the Star-Lite, but no one was about to make a fuss over Roy Mueller's son, since both Roy himself and his older son Donald were both such frequent visitors at this particular check-point. Sexual precocity has always been one of the prerogatives — if not indeed a solemn duty — of the ruling class.

From Albert Lea it was eighty miles due north to Minneapolis. They went in a Greyhound bus without even bothering to try and hitch. The fields you could see from the bus window seemed no different from equivalent fields in Iowa, and even when they hit the outskirts of the city, it was distressingly like the outskirts of Des Moines — patches of ramshackle slums alternating with smaller well-secured stretches of suburban affluence, with the occasional shopping mall and service station saluting them with the giant letters of their names revolving on high poles. There was possibly a little more traffic than there would have been outside Des Moines, but that may have been on account of the rally. Everywhere you went — on lawns, in store windows, stuck to the sides of buildings — were posters announcing the rally and urging the enactment of the Twenty-Eighth Amendment. It was hard to believe, when there were obviously so many millions of people behind it, that the amendment could ever be defeated, but it had been, twice.

Downtown Minneapolis was an amazement of urbanity: its colossal buildings, its sumptuous stores, its swarming streets, the sheer noise, and then, beyond these ascertainable realities, the existence, surmised but wholly probable, of fairies swooping and darting through the glass-and-stone canyons, flitting above the trafficked streets, lighting in flocks on the carved facades of monolithic banks, then spiraling larklike into the azures of midafternoon, like a vastation of bright invisible locusts that fed not on the leaves of trees or on the potted flowers decorating the Mall but on the thoughts, the minds, the souls of all these calm pedestrians. If indeed they

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did. If indeed they were there at all.

The rally was to be at eight o'clock, which gave them another good five hours to kill. Eugene suggested that they see a movie. Daniel was amenable but he didn't want to be the one to suggest which one, since they both knew, from the ads that had been appearing for months in the *Star-Tribune*, what it would have to be. They asked the way to Hennepin Avenue, along which all the moviehouses clustered, and there on the marquee of the World, spelled out in electric letters big as table lamps, was the unacknowledged golden fleece of their questing (*not* General Donnelly, not for a moment): the last legendary musical of the great Betti Bailey, *Gold-Diggers* of 1984.

The movie had a considerable effect on Daniel, then and thereafter. Even if the movie hadn't, the World would have, being so grand and grave, a temple fit for the most solemn initiations. They found seats at the front of the theater and waited while wild sourceless music swelled about them.

This, then, was what it was all about. This, when it issued from within you, was the liberating power that all other powers feared and wished to extirpate: song. It seemed to Daniel that he could feel the music in the most secret recesses of his body, an ethereal surgeon that would rip his soul free from its crippling flesh. He wanted to surrender himself to it utterly, to become a mere magnificence of resonating air. Yet at the same time he wanted to rush back to the usher with the handsome gold braid hat and ask him what this music was called so he could buy the cassette for himself and possess it forever. How terrible that each new rapture should be a farewell! That it could only exist by being taken from him!

Then the lights dimmed, motors parted the shimmering curtains on the stage, and the movie began. The very first sight of Betti Bailey extinguished every thought of the music's ravishments. She was the spitting image of his mother — not as she was now but as he first had seen her: the fingernails, the bra-ed-up breasts and mane of hair, the crisp ellipses drawn above the eyes, the lips that seemed to have been freshly dipped in blood. He had forgotten the impact of that meeting, the embarrassment. The horror. He wished Eugene weren't sitting by him, seeing this.

And yet you had to admit that she — Betti Bailey — was beautiful. In even, strangest of all, an ordinary way.

In the story she was a prostitute who worked in a special brothel in St. Louis that was only for policemen. She didn't like being a prostitute though and dreamed of being a great singer. In her dreams she *was* a great singer, the kind who made the whole audience in the movie theater forget it was only shadows moving on a screen and applaud her along with the audiences of the dream. But in real life, in the brothel's big red bathtub, for instance, or the one time she went walking through the ruins of a botanical garden with the interesting stranger (played by Jackson Florentine), her voice was all wobbly and rasping. People who listened couldn't help cringing, even

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Jackson Florentine, who (it turned out) was a sex maniac being hunted by the police. By the time you found out, he was already working at the brothel, since it was one of the few places people weren't bothered about their ID. He did a comic tap dance in black face with a chorus line of real-life black cops, which led into the big production number of the show, "March of the Businessmen." At the end of the movie the two lovers hooked into a flight apparatus and took off from their bodies for an even bigger production number, an aerial ballet representing their flight north to the icebergs of Baffin Island. The special effects were so good you couldn't help but believe the dancers weren't verily fairies, especially Betti Bailey, and it certainly added to one's sense of its gospel truth to know that shortly after making *Gold-Diggers* Betti Bailey had done the same thing herself — hooked in and taken off, never to return. Her body was still curled up in a fetal ball in some L.A. hospital, and God only knew where the rest of her was — burning up inside the sun or whirling around the rings of Saturn, anything was possible. It did seem a pity that she had never come back just long enough to make another movie like *Gold-Diggers*, at the end of which the police found the bodies of the lovers hooked up into the apparatus and machine-gunned them with the most vivid and painstaking cinematic detail. There wasn't a dry eye in the theater when the lights came on again.

Daniel wanted to stay and hear the music that was starting up again. Eugene needed to go to the toilet. They agreed to meet in the lobby when the music was over. There was still plenty of time to get to the Donnelly rally.

Coming on top of the movie, the music no longer seemed so impressive, and Daniel decided that his time in Minneapolis was too precious to bother repeating any experience, however sublime. Eugene wasn't in the lobby, so he went downstairs to the men's room. Eugene wasn't there either. Possibly he'd had his piss and decided to go back to where Daniel was sitting, but if so, he hadn't stayed there. Daniel waited five, ten, fifteen minutes in the lobby, and still no sign of Eugene. He went up to the front of the theater as the credits for *Gold-Diggers* came on and stood in the flickering dark scanning the faces in the audience. Eugene was not there.

He didn't know if something awful and typically urban had happened to his friend — a mugging, a rape — or if some whim had taken him and he'd gone off on his own. To do what? In any case there seemed no point in waiting around the World, where the usher was obviously becoming impatient with him.

On the theory that whatever had happened to Eugene he'd be sure to try and meet back up with Daniel there, he started walking to Gopher Stadium on the University of Minnesota campus, where the rally was to be held. For blocks before he got to the pedestrian bridge across the Mississippi there were squadrons of students and older sorts handing out leaflets to whoever would take them. Some leaflets declared that a vote for Roberta Donnelly was a vote

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against the forces that were destroying America and told you how to get to the rally. Other leaflets said that people had every right to do what they wanted, even if that meant killing themselves, and still others were downright peculiar, simple headlines without text that could be interpreted as neither for nor against any issue. As, for instance: I DON'T CARE IF THE SUN DON'T SHINE. Or: GIVE US FIVE MINUTES MORE. Just by looking at their faces as you approached them, you couldn't tell which were Undergoders and which weren't. Apparently there were sweet types and sour types on both sides.

The Mississippi was everything people said, a beautiful flat vastness that seemed to have swallowed the sky, with the city even more immense on either shore. Daniel stopped in the middle of the bridge and let his collection of colored leaflets flutter down one by one through that unthinkable space that was neither height nor depth. Houseboats and shops were moored on both sides of the river, and on three or four of them were naked people, men as well as women, tanning in the sun. Daniel was stirred, and disturbed. You could never fully understand any city of such extent and such variety: you could only look at it and be amazed, and look again and be terrified.

He was terrified now. For he knew that Eugene would not be at the rally. Eugene had made his break for it. Maybe that had been his intention from their starting out, or maybe it was the movie that convinced him, since the moral of it (if you could say it had one) was: Give Me Liberty — Or Else! Long ago, Eugene had confided that *someday* he meant to leave Iowa and learn to fly. Daniel had envied him his bravado without for a moment suspecting he could be so dumb as to go and do it like this. And so treacherous! Is that what a best friend was for — to betray?

The son of a bitch!

The sneaky little shit!

And yet. And even so. Hadn't it been and wouldn't it always be worth it — for just this one sight of the river and the memory of that song?

The answer pretty definitely was no, but it was hard to face the fact that he'd been so thoroughly and so needlessly fucked over. There was no point now in seeing General Donnelly, even as an alibi. There was nothing to be done but scoot back to Amesville and hope. He'd have till tomorrow to come up with some halfway likely story to tell the Muellers.

When Eugene's mother stopped by, two evenings later, Daniel's story was plain and unhelpful. Yes, they had camped out in the State Park, and, no, he couldn't imagine where Eugene could have gone to if he hadn't come home. Daniel had ridden back to Amesville ahead of Eugene (for no very cogent reason), and that was the last he knew about him. She didn't ask half the questions he'd been expecting, and she never called back. Two days later it became generally known that Eugene Mueller was missing. His bicycle was discovered in the culvert, where

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Daniel had left it. There were two schools of thought as to what had happened: one, that he was the victim of foul play; the other, that he'd run away. Both were common-enough occurences. Everyone wanted to know Daniel's opinion, since he was the last person to have seen him. Daniel's said that he *hoped* that he'd run away, violence being such a horrible alternative, though he couldn't believe Eugene would have done something so momentous without dropping a hint. In a way his speculations were entirely sincere.

No one seemed at all suspicious, except possibly Milly, who gave him odd looks now and then and wouldn't stop pestering him with questions that became increasingly personal and hard to answer, such as where, if Eugene had run away, would he have gone to? More and more, Daniel felt as though he'd murdered his friend and concealed the body. He could understand what a convenience it was for Catholics to be able to go to confession.

Despite such feelings things soon went back to normal. Jerry Larsen took over Eugene's paper route permanently, and Daniel developed an enthusiasm for baseball that gave him an excuse for being out of the house almost as much as his father.

In July there was a tornado that demolished a trailer court a mile outside of town. That same night, when the storm was over, the county sheriff appeared at the Weinreb's front door with a warrant for Daniel's arrest. Milly became hysterical and tried to phone Roy Mueller, but couldn't get past his answering device. The sheriff insisted stonily that this had nothing to do with anyone but Daniel. He was being arrested for the sale and possession of obscene and seditious materials, which was a Class D felony. For misdemeanors there was a juvenile court, but for felonies Daniel was an adult in the eyes of the law.

He was taken to the police station, fingerprinted, photographed, and put in a cell. The whole process seemed quite natural and ordinary, as if all his life he'd been heading towards this moment. It was a large moment, certainly, and rather solemn, like graduating from high school, but it didn't come as a surprise.

Daniel was as sure as his mother that Roy Mueller was behind his being arrested, but he also knew that he'd been caught dead to rights and that there'd be no wriggling out of it. He'd done what he'd been booked for. Of course, so had about ten other people, not even counting the customers. And what about Heinie Youngermann — were all his pay-offs down the drain? How could they try Daniel and not him?

He found out a week later when the trail was held. Every time the Weinrebs' lawyer would ask Daniel, on the witness stand, where his copies of the *Star-Tribune* had come from, or who else had delivered them, anything that would have involved naming other names, the opposing lawyer raised an objection, which the judge, Judge Cofflin, sustained. Simple as that. The jury found him guilty as charged and

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he was sentenced to eight months in the State Correction Facility at Spirit Lake. He could have got as much as five years, and their lawyer advised them against entering an appeal, since it was up to the same judge whether Daniel would be let off on probation when school started in the fall. They'd have been certain to lose the appeal in any case. Iowa and the rest of the Farm Belt weren't called police states for nothing.

Sitting in the cell day after day and night after night with no one to talk to and nothing to read, Daniel had had a thousand imaginary conversations with Roy Mueller. So that by the time, late on the night before he was to be sent off to Spirit Lake, that Roy Mueller finally did get around to seeing him, he'd been through every possible combination of anger, anguish, dread, and mutual mistrust, and the actual confrontation was a little like the trial, something he had to go through and get over with.

Mueller stayed outside the locked cell. He was a substantial-looking man with a paunch, thick muscles and a friendly manner, even when he was being mean. With his own children he liked to think of himself as a kind of Solomon, stern but munificent, but his children (Daniel knew from Eugene) all lived in terror of him, even as they acted out their roles as his spoiled darlings.

"Well, Daniel, you've got yourself in a fair fix, haven't you?"

Daniel nodded.

"It's too bad, your being sent away like this, but maybe it will do you good. Build some moral fiber. Eh?"

Their eyes met. Mueller's were beaming with pleasure, which he passed off as benevolence.

"I thought there might be something you'd want to tell me before you go. Your mother has been on the phone with me at least once a day since you got in trouble. I thought the least I could do for the poor woman was to come and talk to you."

Daniel said what he'd made his mind up to, that he was guilty of selling the *Star-Tribune* and very sorry for it.

"I'm glad to hear you're taking your medicine in the right spirit, Daniel, but that wasn't exactly what I had in mind for us to talk about. I want to know where my son is, and you're the one who can tell me. Right. Daniel?"

"Honestly, Mr. Mueller, I don't know where he is If I knew I'd tell you. Believe me."

"No hunches or theories?"

"He might —" Daniel had to clear his throat, which was dry and sticky with fear. "He might have gone to Minneapolis."

"Why Minneapolis?"

"We ... used to read about it. When we were delivering the *Star-Tribune.*"

Mueller brushed aside the implications of this — that his son had shared Daniel's so-called crime and that he'd known about it all along — with another toothy smile and a lifting and settling of his paunch.

"And it seemed like an exciting place to go, is that it?"

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"Yes. But not ... I mean, we never talked about leaving Amesville permanently. We just wanted to see it."

"Well, what did you think when you saw it. Did it live up to your expectations?"

"I didn't say —"

But there seemed no point in sparring just for the sake of delaying the inevitable. Daniel could see it went beyond suspicions: Mueller knew.

"We did go there, Mr. Mueller, but believe me, I didn't have any idea that Eugene didn't mean to come back with me. We went there to see Roberta Donnelly. She was giving a speech at Gopher Stadium. After we saw her we were heading right back here. Both of us."

"You admit going there, that's some progress. But I didn't need you to tell me that, Daniel. I knew the night you set off, from Lloyd Wagner, who let the two of you across the border, which is a mistake that Lloyd has had reason to regret. But that's another story. When there was no sight of you coming back after the Star-Lite's last show, Lloyd realized he'd made a mistake and called me. It was a simple thing, from there, to have the Albert Lea police check out the bus station and the drivers. So you see, my lad, I need a little more information than just —" He parodied Daniel, making his eyes wide with false candor, and whispering: "— Minneapolis."

"Truly, Mr. Mueller, I've told you all I know. We went to a movie together, and at the end of it Eugene said he had to go to the bathroom. That was the last I saw of him."

"What movie?"

"*Gold-Diggers of 1984*. At the World Theater. The tickets cost four dollars."

"He disappeared and that was it? You didn't look for him?"

"I waited around. And then, after a while, I went to the rally, hoping to see him there. What else *could* I do? Minneapolis is huge. And also...."

"Yes?"

"Well, I figured he probably *meant* to get away from me. So he was probably deliberately hiding from me. But what I couldn't understand then, and I still can't, is why, if he *knew* he wasn't coming back, why he had to involve me in it. I mean, I'm his best friend."

"It's not very logical, is it?"

"It's not. So my theory — and I've had a lot of time to think about this — my theory is that the idea came to him while he was there, probably right during the movie. It was a movie that could have done that."

"There's only one thing wrong with your theory, Daniel."

"Mr. Mueller, I'm telling you everything I know. Everything."

"There's one good reason why I don't believe you."

Daniel looked down at the toes of his shoes. None of his imaginary conversations with Mr. Mueller had gone as badly as this. He'd made his confession but it had done him no good. He'd run out of possible things to say.

"Don't you want to know what that reason is?"

"What?"

"Because my son had the foresight to steal eight hundred and forty-five

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dollars from my desk before he went away. That doesn't sound like a spur-of-the-moment decision, does it?"

"No." Daniel shook his head vigorously. "Eugene wouldn't do that."

"Well, he did. The money's gone, and I scarcely think it was a coincidence that Eugene should decide to run away at the exact same time."

Daniel couldn't think what he thought. His expression of disbelief had been no more than the last remnant of his loyalty. Friends don't involve their friends in crimes. Except, apparently, they do.

"Do you have any other suggestions, Daniel, as to where I can tell the police to look for my son?"

"No, Mr. Mueller. Honestly."

"If any idea should come to you, you have only to ask to talk to Warden Shiel at Spirit Lake. Of course, you understand that if you are able to help us find Eugene you'll be doing yourself a considerable favor when it comes time to discuss your parole. Judge Cofflin knows about this situation, and it was only at my repeated insistence that you weren't indicted for first-degree robbery as well."

"Mr. Mueller, believe me, if I knew anything else at all, I'd tell you."

Mueller looked at him with a look of leisurely, contented malice and turned to leave.

"Really!" Daniel insisted.

Mueller turned back to look at him a last time. From the way he stood there, smiling, Daniel knew that he believed him — but that he didn't care. He'd got what he was after, a new victim, an adopted son.

***

His first night in the compound at Spirit Lake, sleeping out of doors on sparse, trampled crabgrass, Daniel had a nightmare. It began with music, or sounds like but less ordered than music, long notes of some unknown timbre, neither voice nor violin, each one sustained beyond thought's reach, yet lacing together into a structure large and labyrinthine. At first he thought he was inside a church, but it was too plain for that, the space too open.

A bridge. The covered bridge above the Mississippi. He stood on it, suspended above the moving waters, an intolerable expanse of blackness scored with the wavering lights of boats that seemed as far away, as unapproachable as stars. And then, causelessly, awfully, this scene was rotated through ninety degrees and the flowing river became a wall still whirling upwards. It towered to an immense unthinkable height and hung there, threatening to collapse. No, its flowing and its collapse were a single, infinitely slow event, and he fled from it over the windows of the inner bridge. Sometimes the long sheets of glass would fracture under his weight, like the winter's earliest ice. He felt as though he were being hunted by some sluggish, shapeless god that would — let him flee where he might — surely crush him and roll him flat beneath his supreme inexorable immensity. All this, as the music lifted into a whistling louder than any factory's to become at last the PA system's tape of reveille.

His stomach still hurt, though not so acutely as in the first hours after

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he'd forced down the P-W lozenge. He'd been afraid then that, despite all the water he was drinking, it would lodge in his throat instead of his stomach. It was that big. The first set of its time-release enzymes burned out a small ulcer in the lining of the stomach, which the second set (the ones working now) proceeded to heal, sealing the lozenge itself into the scar tissue of the wound it had created. The whole process took less than a day, but, even so, Daniel and the seven other newly admitted prisoners had nothing to do but let their situation sink in while the lozenges wove themselves into the ruptured tissues.

Daniel had supposed he'd be the youngest prisoner, but as it turned out, a good percentage of the people he could see being assembled and sent out in work crews were his own age, and many of these, if not probably younger, were a lot scrawnier. The moral of this observation being the basically happy one that if they could survive at Spirit Lake, then so could he.

It seemed to be the case that a majority of the others, even those his age, had been in prison before. That, anyhow, was the subject that united five of the seven others once the compound had been emptied by the morning's call-up. For a while he sat on the sidelines taking it in, but their very equanimity and easy humor began to get at him. Here they were, sentenced many of them to five years or more of what they already knew was going to be sheer misery, and they were acting like it was a family reunion. Insane.

By comparison the poultry farmer from Humboldt County who'd been sent up for child abuse seemed, for all his belly-aching, or maybe because of it, normal and reasonable, a man with a grievance who wanted you to know just how all-out miserable he was. Daniel tried talking to him, or rather, listening, to help him get his mind more settled, but after a very short time the man developed a loop, saying the same things over in almost the identical words as the first and then the second time through — how sorry he was for what he'd done, how he hadn't *meant* to harm the child, though she had baited him and *knew* she was at fault, how the insurance might pay for the chickens but not for all the work, not for all the time, how children *need* their parents and the authority they represent; and then, again, how sorry he was for what he'd done. Which was (as Daniel later found out) to beat his daughter unconscious and almost to death with the carcass of a hen.

To get away from him Daniel wandered about the compound, facing up to his bad news item by item — the stink of the open latrines, the not much nicer stink inside the dormitories, where a few of the feeblest prisoners were laid out on the floor, sleeping or watching the sunlight inch along the grimy sheets of plywood. One of them asked him for a glass of water, which he went and drew at the tap outside, not in a glass, since there were none to be found, but in a paper cup from McDonald's so old and crunched out of shape it barely served to hold the water till he got back inside.

The strangest thing about Spirit

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Lake was the absence of bars, barbed wire, or other signs of their true condition. There weren't even guards. The prisoners ran their own prison democratically, which meant, as it did in the bigger democracy outside, that almost everyone was cheated, held ransom, and victimized except for the little self-appointed army that ran the place. This was not a lesson that Daniel learned at once. It took many days and as many skimped dinners before the message got across that unless he reached some kind of accommodation with the powers-that-be he wasn't going to survive even as long as to September, when he expected to be paroled back to school. It was possible, actually, to starve to death. That, in fact, was what was happening to the people in the dormitory. If you didn't work, the prison didn't feed you, and if you didn't have money, or know someone who did, that was it.

What he did learn that first morning, and unforgettably, was that the P-W lozenge sealed in his innards was the authentic and bona fide sting of death.

Some time around noon there was a commotion among the other convalescent prisoners. They were shouting at the poultry farmer Daniel had talked to earlier, who was running full-tilt down the gravel road going to the highway. When he'd gone a hundred yards and was about the same distance from the fieldstone posts that marked the entrance to the compound, a whistle started blowing. A few yards farther on, the farmer doubled over; radio signals broadcast by the P-W security system as he passed through the second perimeter had detonated the plastic explosive in the lozenge in his stomach.

In a while the warden's pickup appeared far off down the highway, hooting and flashing its lights.

"You know," said one of the black prisoners, in a reflective, ingratiating tone, like an announcer's, "I could see that coming a mile away, a mile away. It's always that kind that lets go first."

"Dumb shit," said a girl who had something wrong with her legs. "That's all he was, a dumb shit."

"Oh, I'm not so sure," said the black. "Anyone can get an attack of conscience. Usually it takes a bit more abuse, not just the idea."

"Do many people ... uh ...?" It was the first Daniel had spoken, except to fend off questions.

"Let go? A camp this size, about one a week, I'd say. Less in summer, more in winter, but that's the average."

Others agreed. Some disagreed. Soon they were comparing notes again. The farmer's body, meanwhile, had been loaded into the rear of the pickup. Before he got back into the cab, the guard waved at the watching prisoners. They did not wave back. The truck did a U-turn and returned, squealing, back to the green horizon from which it had appeared.

Originally the P-W security system (the initials commemorated the Welsh physicians who developed it, Drs. Poole and Williams) who employed less drastic means of reforming character than instant death. When triggered, the ear-

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liest lozenges released only enough toxins to cause momentary, acute nausea and colonic spasms. In this form the P-W system had been hailed as the Model-T of behavioral engineering. Within a decade of its commercial availability there was scarcely a prison anywhere in the world that hadn't converted to its use. Though the motive for reform may have been economic, the result invariably was a more humane prison environment, simply because there was no longer a need for the same close scrutiny and precautions. It was for this reason that Drs. Poole and Williams were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991.

Only gradually, and never in the United States, was its use extended to so-called "hostage populations" of potentially dissident civilians — the Basques in Spain, Jews in Russia, the Irish in England, and so on. It was in these countries that explosives began to replace toxins and where, too, systems of decimation and mass reprisal were developed, whereby a central broadcasting system could transmit coded signals that could put to death any implanted individual, any group or a given proportion of that group, or, conceivably, an entire population. The largest achieved kill-ratio was the decimation of Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip, and this was not the consequence of a human decision but of computer error. Usually the mere presence of the P-W system was sufficient to preclude its use except in individual cases.

At the Spirit Lake Correction Facility it was possible to send out work crews to farms and industries within a radius of fifty miles (the range of the system's central radio tower) with no other supervision than the black box by which the prisoners, singly or as a group, could be directed, controlled, and, if need be, extirpated. The result was a work force of singular effectiveness that brought the State of Iowa revenues far in excess of the cost of administration. However, the system was just as successful in reducing crime, and so there was never enough convict labor to meet the demands of the area's farms and factories, which had to resort to the more troublesome (if somewhat less costly) migrant workers, recruited in the bankrupt cities of the eastern seaboard.

It was such urban migrants who, falling afoul of the law, constituted by far the better part of the prison population at Spirit Lake. Daniel had never in his life known such various, interesting people, and it wasn't just Daniel who was impressed. They all seemed to take an inflated view of their collective identity, as though they were an exiled aristocracy, beings larger and more honorable than the dogged trolls and dwarves of day-to-day life. Which is not to say that they were nice to each other (or to Daniel); they weren't. The resentment they felt for the world at large, their sense of having been marked, almost literally, for the slaughter, was too great to be contained. It could lead even the mildest of them at times to betray this theoretical sodality for the sake of a hamburger or a laugh or the rush that accompanied the smash of your own fist into any available

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face. But the bad moments were like firecrackers — they exploded and a smell lingered for a few hours and then even that was gone — while the good moments were like sunlight, a fact so basic you almost never considered it was there.

Of course it was summer, and that helped. They worked longer hours, but they worked at pleasant jobs, out of doors, for farmers who had a rational regard for what was possible. (The factories were said to be much worse, but they wouldn't reopen till late in October.) Often there would be extra food, and when your life centers around getting enough to eat (the rations at Spirit Lake were, deliberately, *not* enough), this was an important consideration.

It was the times in between that were so weirdly wonderful, times of an idleness as plain and pure as the shaking of leaves in a tree. Times between reveille and being hustled into the trucks, or times you waited for a truck to come and take you back. Times that a sudden storm would cancel out the day's baling, and you could wait among the silences of the ceasing rain, in the glow of the late, returning light.

At such times consciousness became something more than just a haphazard string of thoughts about this, that, and the other. You knew yourself to be alive with a vividness so real and personal it was like God's gloved hand wrapping itself about your spine and squeezing. Alive and human: he, Daniel Weinreb, was a human being! It was something he'd never even considered up till now.

***

There was a part of the compound set aside for visitors with pine trees, picnic tables, and a row of swings. Since visitors were only allowed on Sundays, and since few of the prisoners were ever visited in any case, the place looked unnaturally nice compared to the weedy fields and bare dirt of the compound proper, though for the visitors, coming to it from the outside world, it probably seemed plain enough, a park such as you would have found in any neighboring town.

Hearing the squeals of his sisters before they became visible behind the screen of pines, Daniel stopped to get hold of himself. He seemed quite steady and far from tears. Approaching nearer, he could see them through the branches. Aurelia was on one of the swings and Cecelia was pushing her. He felt like a ghost in a story, hovering about his living past. There beyond the twins was his father, in the front seat of a Hertz, smoking his pipe. Milly was nowhere to be seen. Daniel had thought she wouldn't come but, even so, it was a disappointment.

To his credit he didn't let that show when at last he emerged from behind the trees. He was all hugs and kisses for the twins, and by the time his father reached the swings, Daniel's arms were full.

"How are you, Daniel?" Abraham asked.

Daniel said, "I'm fine." And then, to nail it down: "In fact I really am." He smiled — a smile as plausible as this little park.

He set the twins down on the grass and shook hands with his father.

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"Your mother meant to come but at the last minute she didn't feel up to it. We agreed it probably wouldn't do your morale any good to see her in one of her ... uh...."

"Probably," Daniel agreed.

"And it probably wouldn't be that good for *her* morale, either. Though, I must say, this place —" Pointing at the trees with his pipestem. "— is a bit, uh, nicer than I was expecting."

Daniel nodded.

"Are you hungry? We brought a picnic."

"Me? I'm always hungry." Which was truer than he would have cared to be known.

While they spread out the food on the table, another car arrived with other visitors. Having them as an audience made it easier. There was a roast chicken, which Daniel got the better part of, and a bowl of potato salad with what seemed a pound of bacon crumbled in it. Abraham apologized for there being only a quart of milk for everyone to drink. The beer he'd brought had been confiscated at the checkpoint on the highway.

While he ate, his father explained all that was being done to have Daniel released. A lot of people, apparently, were incensed about his being sent to Spirit Lake, but they were none of them the right people. A petition had been sent to Mayor MacLean, who returned it saying the whole thing was out of his hands. His father showed him a typed list of the names on the petition. A lot of them had been customeres on his route, others he recognized as his father's patients, but the surprising thing was how many of them he'd never heard of. He had become a cause.

For all that, it was the food that registered. Daniel had got so used to the processed food at Spirit Lake he'd forgotten what an enormous difference there could be between that and the real thing. After the chicken and potato salad, Abraham unwrapped a carrot cake. That moment was the closest Daniel came to breaking down during the whole visit.

When the food was gone Daniel became conscious of the usual obscuring awkwardness rising up again between him and his father. He sat there staring at the weathered boards of the table, trying to think of what to say, but when he did come up with something it never precipitated a real conversation. The excitement at the other picnic table, where they were talking Spanish, seemed a reproach to their own lengthening silences.

Cecelia, who had already been carsick on the ride to Spirit Lake, rescued them by tossing up her lunch. After her dress had been sponged clean, Daniel played hide-and-seek with the twins. They had finally got the idea that there wasn't just a single hiding place to hide in, but a whole world. Twice Aurelia went beyond the fieldstone posts marking the perimeter to find a place to hide, and each time it was like a knife right through his stomach. Theoretically you weren't supposed to be able to feel the lozenge, but no one who'd ever been implanted believed that.

Eventually it was time for them to go. Since he hadn't found a way to

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lead round to it by degrees, Daniel was forced to come right out with the subject of McDonald's. He waited till the twins were strapped into their seatbelts and then asked his father for a word in private.

"It's about the food here," he began when they were by themselves.

As he'd feared, his father became indignant when he'd explained about the rations being deliberately less than the minimum for subsistence. He started going on about the petition again.

Daniel managed to be urgent without being swept along. "It's no use complaining, Dad. People have tried and it doesn't do any good. It's the policy. What you can do is pay what they call the 'supplement.' Then they bring in extra food from McDonald's. It doesn't make such a big difference now, 'cause most of the farmers, when we go out and work for them, usually scrape up something extra for us. But later on, in winter, it can be nasty. That's what they say."

"Of course, Daniel, we'll do all we possibly can. But you certainly will be home before winter. As soon as school starts again, they'll have to put you on probation."

"Right. But meanwhile I need whatever you can let me have. The supplement costs thirty-five dollars a week, which is a lot to pay for a Big Mac and french fries, but what can I say? They've got us over a barrel."

"My God, Daniel, it's not the money — it's the idea of what they're doing here. It's extortion! I can't believe —"

"Please, Dad — *whatever* you do, don't complain."

"Not till you're out of here, certainly. Who do I pay?"

"Ask for Sergeant Di Franco when they stop you at the checkpoint on the way back. He'll tell you an address to send the money to. I'll pay it all back, I promise."

Abraham took his appointment book out of the breast pocket of his suit and wrote down the name. His hand was shaking. "Di Franco," he repeated. "That reminds me. I think that was the fellow who made me leave your book with him. Your old friend Mrs. Boismortier has been by the house several times, asking after you, and the last time she brought a present for me to bring you. A book. You may get it eventually, once they've made sure it's not subversive."

"I don't know. They don't let many books through. Just Bibles and like that. But tell her thank you for me anyhow."

The last formalities went off without a hitch, and the Hertz drove away into the brightness of the inaccessible world outside. Daniel stayed in the visiting area, rocking gently in one of the swings until the whistle blew, summoning him to the six o'clock roll call. He kept thinking of the mixing bowl that the potato salad had come in. Something about its shape or its color seemed to sum up everything he'd ever loved. And lost forever.

Forever, fortunately, isn't a notion that can do you lasting harm at the flexible age of fourteen. True enough,

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there was something Daniel *had* lost forever by coming here to Spirit Lake. Call it faith in the system — the faith that had allowed him to write his third-prize essay way back when — or maybe just an ability to look the other way while the losers were being trounced by the winners in the fixed game of life. But whatever you call it, it was something he'd have had to lose eventually anyhow. This was just a rougher form of farewell — a kick in the stomach rather than a wave of the hand.

It didn't even take a night's sleep with its standard nightmare to put Daniel into a fitter frame of mind. By lights-out he was already looking at the little horrors and afflictions of his prison in the perspective of practical sanity, the perspective by which one's immediate surroundings, whatever they are, are seen simply as what is.

He had played a game of chess with his friend Bob Lundgren, not an especially good game but no worse than usual. Then he had wormed his way into a conversation between Barbara Steiner and some of the other older prisoners on the subject of politics. Their talk was in its own way as much over his head as Bob Lundgren's chess, at least as far as his being able to contribute to it. They made hash of his most basic assumptions, but it was delicious hash, and Barbara Steiner, who was the clearest headed and sharpest tongued of the lot of them, seemed to know the effect she was having on Daniel and to enjoy leading him from one unspeakable heresy to the next. Daniel didn't consider whether he actually agreed with any of this. He was just caught up in the excitement of being a spectator to it, the way he enjoyed watching a fight or listening to a story. It was a sport and he was its fan.

But it was the music that had the largest (if least understandable) effect on him. Night after night there was music. Not music such as he'd ever conceived of before; not music that could be named, the way, when it was your turn to ask for your favorite song in Mrs. Boismortier's class you could ask for "Santa Lucia" or "Old Black Joe" and the class would sing it and it would be there, recognizably the same, fixed always in that certain shape. Here, there were tunes usually, yes, but they were always shifting round, disintegrating into mere raw rows of notes that still somehow managed to be music. The way they did it was beyond him, and at times the why of it as well. Especially, it seemed, when the three prisoners who were generally accounted the best musicians got together to play. Then, though he might be swept off his feet at the start, inevitably their music would move off somewhere he couldn't follow. It was like being a three-year-old and trying to pay attention to grown-up talk. But there seemed to be this difference between the language of music and the language of words. It didn't seem possible, in the language of music, to lie.

Days later, after he'd dismissed the possibility of ever seeing it, the book Mrs. Boismortier had sent Daniel via his father arrived. It had got past the censor relatively intact, with only a few pages snipped out towards the end.

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The front cover showed an ingratiating Jesus crowned with thorns, holding out a hamburger. Drops of blood from Jesus and drops of catsup from the burger mingled in a crimson pool from which the words of the title rose up like little lime-green islands: *The Product Is God* by Jack Van Dyke. It came with testimonials from a number of unfamiliar show business celebrities and from the *Wall Street Journal,* which called Reverend Van Dyke "the sinister minister" and declared his theology to be "the newest wrinkle in eternal truth. A real bombshell." He was the head of Marble Collegiate Church in New York City.

Though it was about religion, an area Daniel had never supposed he could take an interest in, he was glad to get it. In the congested dorms of Spirit Lake, a book, any book, was a refuge, the nearest possible approach to privacy. Besides, Mrs. Boismortier's earlier batting average had been pretty good. So maybe *The Product Is God* would be truly interesting. The cover was lurid enough. Anyhow, what was the competition? A couple of scruffy Bibles and a stack of unread (because unreadable) Undergod tracts about iniquity, repentance, and how suffering was a matter for rejoicing once you found Christ. Only prisoners with desperately long terms, fifteen or twenty years, ever pretended to take any of that seriously. There was theoretically a better chance to get paroled if you could convince the authorities you were a true believer. Needless to say, it never helped: the hope was part of the punishment.

It was clear right from page one that Van Dyke was no Undergoder, though just what he was Daniel couldn't quite tell. An atheist it almost seemed, from some of the things he said. Like this, from the "Prefatory Postscript," before he even got warmed up: "Often it has been objected, by this book's admirers and its detractors alike, that I speak of Almighty God as though he were no more than some exceptionally clever idea I'd got hold of, like a new theorem in geometry, or a scenario for an original ballet. In large part I must allow that this is so, but it doesn't bother me, and I'm sure it doesn't bother God. However He may concern Himself with human fate, He is surely indifferent to human controversy." Or this, from the same Postscript: "The Most High is perfectly willing to be understood as an illusion, since our doubts only make our trust in Him that much more savory of His tongue. He is, we must remember, the King of Kings, and shares the general kinky taste of kings for displays of their subjects' abasement. Doubt Him, by all means, say I, when I speak to doubters, but don't on that account neglect to worship Him."

This was religion? It seemed almost the opposite, a burlesque, but Mrs. Boismortier (a good Episcopalian) had sent the book to him, and someone in the hierarchy of the prison, possibly even Warden Shiel, had passed it on, and millions of people, according to the cover, were able to take Reverend Van Dyke seriously.

Seriousness aside, Daniel was enthralled by the book. After a long dus-

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ty day of detasseling corn he would return to its paradoxes and mental loop-the-loops with a feeling of immersing himself in seltzer water. Just a few paragraphs and his mind was all tingly and able to think again, at which point he would return the book to its home in his mattress of huskings and straw.

Chapter One was an explanation, more or less, of the book's garish cover, and of its title too. It was about a bunch of people who start a chain of fast-food restaurants, called Super-King. The chain is run not for profit but to give everybody something really good — Super-King Hamburgers and Super-King Cola, which, according to the chain's big ad campaign, are supposed to make you live forever and always be happy, if you eat enough of them. No one is actually expected to *believe* the ads, but the chain is an enormous success anyhow. There were graphs and sales figures to illustrate its growth across the whole country and around the world. Of course the actual product the Super-King people were selling wasn't hamburgers and such, it was an idea — the idea of Jesus, who was both God and an ordinary man and therefore a complete impossibility. *Therefore,* since He represented the best possible bargain, everybody should buy that product, which was basically what had happened over the last two thousand years — the rise of Christianity being the same as the success of the Super-King chain.

Chapter Two was about the difficulty of believing in things — not just in religion, but in advertising, in sex, in your own daily life. Van Dyke argued that even when we know that companies aren't telling the complete truth about their products, we should buy them anyhow (as long as they aren't actually harmful) because the country and the economy would collapse if we didn't. "By the same token," Van Dyke wrote, "lies about God, such as we find in Holy Scripture, help us keep our psychic economy running. If we can believe, for instance, that the world was all knocked together in six days rather than in however many billions of years, we've come a long way toward self-mastery." The rest of the chapter was a kind of advertisement for God and all the things He would do for you once you "bought" him, such as keeping you from every being depressed or bitter or coming down with colds.

Chapter Three was titled "Wash Your Own Brain" and was about techniques you could use in order to start believing in God. Most of the techniques were based on methods of acting. Van Dyke explained that long ago religious-type people had been against plays and actors because by watching them people learned to think of all their feelings and ideas as arbitrary and interchangeable. An actor's identity was nothing more than a hat he put on or took off at will, and what was true for actors was true for us all. The world was a stage.

"What our Puritan forebears failed to recognize," Van Dyke wrote, "is the evangelical application of these insights. For if the way we become the kind of people we are is by pretending, then the way to become good, devout,

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and faithful Christians (which, admit it, is a well-nigh impossible undertaking) is to *pretend* to be good, devout, and faithful. Study the role and rehearse it energetically. You must *seem* to love your neighbor no matter how much you hate his guts. You must *seem* to accept sufferings, even if you're drafting your suicide note. You must say that you *know* that your Redeemer liveth, even though you know no such thing. Eventually, saying makes it so."

He went on to relate the story of one of his parishioners, the actor Jackson Florentine (the same Jackson Florentine who'd co-starred in *Gold-Diggers of 1984!*), who had been unable to believe in Jesus with a fervent and heartfelt belief until Reverend Van Dyke had made him pretend to believe in the Easter Bunny, a major idol in Florentine's childhood pantheon. The doubting actor prayed before a holographic picture of the Easter Bunny, wrote long confessional letters to him, and meditated on the various mysteries of his existence or nonexistence, as the case might be, until at last on Easter morning he found no less than one hundred forty-four brightly dyed Easter eggs hidden all over the grounds of his East Hampton estate. Having revived this "splinter of the Godhead," as Van Dyke termed it, it was a simple matter to take the next step and be washed in the blood of the Lamb and dried with its soft white fleece.

Before Daniel got to Chapter Four — "A Salute to Hypocrisy" — the book was missing from his mattress. For a moment, finding it gone, he felt berserk with loss. Wave after wave of desolation swept through him and kept him from sleep. Why should it mean so much? Why should it mean anything? It was a ridiculous book that he'd never have bothered with if there had been anything else on hand.

But the feeling couldn't be argued away. He wanted it back. He ached to be reading it again, to be outraged by its dumb ideas. It was as though part of his brain had been stolen.

Over and above this simple hurt and hunger was the frustration of having no one to complain to. The theft of a book was a trifling injustice in a world where justice did not obtain and no one expected it to.

Late in September the word came through, in a letter from his lawyer in Amesville, that his sentence was *not* to be reduced or suspended. It didn't come as a surprise. He'd tried to believe he'd be paroled but never really believed he'd believed it. He didn't believe anything. It amazed him how cynical he'd become in just a couple of months.

Even so, there were times when he felt such a passionate self-pity that he had to go off by himself and cry, and other times worse than that when a depression would settle over him so black and absolute that there was no way to fight against it or argue his way out of it. It was like a physical disease.

He would tell himself, though not out loud, that he *refused* to be broken, that it was just a matter of holding out one day at a time. But this was whist-

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ling in the dark. He knew if they wanted to break him they would. In fact, they probably weren't going to bother. It was enough that he should be made to appreciate that their power, so far as it affected him, was limitless.

Until March 14.

What he hadn't been prepared for was the effect this news had on the attitude of the other prisoners. All through the summer Daniel had felt himself ignored, avoided, belittled. Even the friendliest of his fellow prisoners seemed to take the attitude that this was his summer vacation, while the unfriendliest were openly mocking. Once he'd had to fight to establish his territorial rights in the dorm, and thereafter no one had overstepped the bounds of a permitted formal sarcasm. But now, surely, the fact (so clear to Daniel) that *he* was as much a victim as they were should have begun to be clear to them too. But it wasn't. There were no more jokes about summer camp, since summer was definitely over, but otherwise he remained an outsider, tolerated at the edge of other people's conversations but not welcomed into them.

This is not to say that he was lonely. There were many other outsiders at Spirit Lake — native Iowans who'd been sent up for embezzlement or rape and who still considered themselves to be uniquely and privately guilty (or not guilty, for what difference that made) rather than members of a community. They still believed in the possibility of good and evil, right and wrong, whereas the general run of prisoners seemed impatient with such ideas.

Among the Iowa contingent the one Daniel was friendliest with was Bob Lundgren. Bob, who was twenty-three and the youngest son of an Undergod farmer in Dickson County, was serving a year for drunk driving, though that was only a pretext. In fact he'd tried to kill his older brother, but a jury had found him not guilty, since there'd been no one's word for it but the brother's, who was an unpleasant, untrustworthy individual.

Bob wasn't a big talker. Mostly they just played slow, thinking games of chess when they got together. Strategically, Bob was always way ahead. There was never any chance of Daniel's winning, any more than he could have won against Bob at arm-wrestling, but there was a kind of honor in losing by a slow attrition rather than being wiped out by a completely unexpected coup. After a while there got to be a strange satisfaction that had nothing to do with winning or losing, a fascination with the patterns of play that developed on the board, patterns like the loops of magnetic force that iron filings will form on a sheet of paper, only much more complicated. Such a blessed self-forgetfulness came over them then, as if, as they sat there contemplating the microcosm of the chessboard, they were escaping from Spirit Lake; as if the complex spaces of the board were truly another world, created by thought but as real as electrons. Even so, it would have been nice to win just one game. Or to play to a draw, at least.

He always lost to Barbara Steiner

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too, but there seemed less disgrace in that, since their contests were only verbal and there were no hard-and-fast rules. Logomachies. Winning was anything from a look in the other person's eye to downright belly laughter. Losing was simply the failure to score as many points, though you could also lose more spectacularly by being a bore. Barbara had very definite opinions as to who was and wasn't a bore. People who told jokes, even very good jokes, were automatically set down as bores, as well as people who described the plots of old movies or argued about the best make of automobile. Daniel she accounted a hick, but not a bore, and she would listen contentedly to his descriptions of various Amesville types, such as his last-year's homeroom teacher, Mrs. Norberg, who was a social studies teacher and had not read a newspaper in over five years because she thought they were seditious. Sometimes she let him run on for what seemed hours, but usually they took turns, one anecdote leading to another. Her range was enormous. She'd been everywhere, done everything, and seemed to remember it all. Now she was serving three years, half of it behind her, for performing abortions in Waterloo. But that, as she liked to say, was just the tip of the iceberg. Every new anecdote seemed to have her in a different state working at another kind of job. Sometimes Daniel wondered if she wasn't making at least a part of it up.

People had different opinions as to whether Barbara was homely or only plain. Her two most noticeable defects were her wide, meaty-looking lips and her stringy black hair that was always dotted with enormous flakes of dandruff. Perhaps with good clothes and beauty parlors she might have passed muster, but lacking such assists there wasn't much she could do. Also, it didn't help that she was six months pregnant. None of which stood in the way of her having as much sex as she liked. Sex at Spirit Lake was a seller's market.

Officially the prisoners weren't supposed to have sex at all, except when spouses came to visit, but the monitors who watched them over the closed-circuit TV would usually let it pass so long as it didn't look like a rape. There was even a corner in one of the dorms screened off with newspapers, like a Japanese house, where you could go to fuck in relative privacy. Most women charged two Big Macs or the equivalent, though there was one black girl, a cripple, who gave blow jobs for free. Daniel watched the couples going in back of the paper screen and listened to them with a kind of haunted feeling in his chest. He thought about it more than he wanted to, but he abstained. Partly from prudential reasons, since a lot of the prisoners, men and women both, had a kind of venereal warts for which there didn't seem to be a cure, but also partly (as he explained to Barbara) because he wanted to wait till he was in love. Barbara was quite cynical on the subject of love, having suffered more than her share in that area, but Daniel liked to think she secretly approved of his idealism.

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She wasn't cynical about everything. At times, indeed, she could outdo Daniel in the matter of principles, the most amazing of which was her latest idea that everyone *always* got exactly what he or she deserved. At Spirit Lake this was on a par with praising steak to vegetarians, since just about everyone, including Daniel, felt he'd been railroaded. They might or might not believe in justice in an abstract sense, but they certainly didn't think justice had anything to do with the legal system of the State of Iowa.

"I mean," Daniel insisted earnestly, "what about *my* being here? Where is the justice in that?"

Only a few days earlier he'd told her the complete story of how, and why, he'd been sent up (hoping all the while that the monitors, off in their offices, were tuned in), and Barbara had agreed then it was a travesty. She'd even offered a theory that the world was arranged so that simply to exist you had to be violating some law or other. That way, the higher-ups always had some pretext for pouncing when they wanted you.

"The justice of your being here isn't for what you *did,* dumbbell. It's for what you didn't do. You didn't follow your own inner promptings. That was your big mistake. *That's* what you're here for."

"Bullshit."

"Bull-*shit,*" she replied coolly, turning the inflection around against him. "Purity of heart is to will one thing. You ever heard that saying?"

"A stitch in time saves nine. Won't that do as well?"

"Think about it. When you went to Minneapolis with that friend of yours, *then* you were doing the right thing, following the spirit where it led. But when you came back you did the wrong thing."

"For Christ's sake, I was fourteen."

"Your friend didn't go back to Iowa. How old was he?"

"Fifteen."

"In any case, Daniel, age has nothing to do with anything. It's the excuse people use till they're old enough to acquire better excuses — a wife, or children, or a job. There are always going to be excuses if you look for them."

"Then what's yours?"

"The commonest in the world. I got greedy. I was pulling in money hand over fist, and so I stayed on in a hick town long after I should have left. I didn't like it there, and *it* didn't like me."

"You think it's fair you should be sent to prison for that, for going after the money? 'Cause you did say, the other day, that you didn't think doing the abortions was in any way wrong."

"It was the first time I ever sinned against my own deepest feelings, and also the first time I've been to prison."

"So? It could be a coincidence, couldn't it? I mean, if there were a tornado tomorrow, or you were struck by lightning, would that also be something you *deserved?*"

"No. And that's how I know there won't be a tornado. Or the other thing."

"You're impossible."

"You're sweet," she said, and

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smiled. Because of her pregnancy her teeth were in terrible condition. She got supplements, but apparently not enough. If she wasn't careful, she was going to lose all of them. At twenty-seven years of age. It didn't seem fair.

There were a couple weeks in the middle of October when the pace slackened. There wasn't enough work left on the farms to make it worth the gasoline to drive to Spirit Lake and get a crew. Daniel wondered if the prisoners were really as glad to be lazing about the compound as they said. Without work the days stretched out into Saharas of emptiness, with the certainty of something much worse waiting up ahead.

When the new winter rosters were made up, Daniel found himself assigned to Consolidated Food Systems' "Experimental Station 78," which was not, in fact, all that experimental, having been in production steadily for twenty years. The company's PR department had simply never found a more attractive way to describe this side of the business, which was the breeding of a specially mutated form of termite that was used as a supplement in various extended meat and cheese products. The bugs bred at Station 78, in all their billions, were almost as economical a source of protein as soybeans, since they could be grown in the labyrinthine underground bunkers to quite remarkable sizes with no other food source than a black sludge-like paste produced for next to nothing by various urban sanitation departments. The termites' ordinary life-cycle had been simplified and adapted to assembly-line techniques, which were automated so that, unless there was a breakdown, workers weren't obliged to go into the actual tunnels. Daniel's job at the station was to tend a row of four-kiloliter vats in which the bugs were cooked and mixed with various chemicals, in the course of which they changed from a lumpy dark-gray mulch to a smooth batter the color of orange juice. In either condition it was still toxic, so as to protein there was no dividend working here. However, the job was considered something of a plum, since it involved very little real work and the temperature down in the station was an invariable 83°F. For eight hours a day you were guaranteed a level of warmth and well-being that was actually illegal in some parts of the country.

Even so, Daniel wished he'd been posted to any other job. He'd never had any qualms before about extended foods, and there was little resemblance between what he could imagine back in the tunnels and what he could see in the vats, but despite that he couldn't get over a constant queasiness. Sometimes a live termite, or a whole little swarm of them, would manage to make it past the mashers and into the area where Daniel worked, and each time it was as though a switch had been thrown that turned reality into nightmare. None of the other prisoners were so squeamish, it was irrational, but he couldn't help it. He would have to go after the loose bugs, to keep them from getting into the batter in the vats. They were blind and their wings were not

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suited to sustained flight, which made them easy to swat but also more sinister somehow, the way they caromed and collided into each other. There was nothing they could do and nowhere they could go, since they couldn't reproduce sexually, and there was nothing outside the station's tunnels they could digest. Their only purpose in life was to grow to a certain size and then be pulped — and they'd evaded that purpose. To Daniel it seemed that the same thing had happened to him.

With the coming of winter things got steadily worse, week by week. Working down in the station, Daniel saw less and less of actual daylight, but that wasn't so different from going to school during the darkest months of the year. The worst of it was the cold. The dorms leaked so badly that from the middle of November on it was hard to sleep, the cold was that intense. Daniel slept with two older men who worked the same shift at the station, since people in general objected to the smell of the bugs they all swore they could smell on them. One of the men had a problem with his bladder and wet the bed sometimes while he was asleep. It was strange having the same thing happen again here with grown men that had happened during the pipeline crisis with the twins.

He began having trouble with his digestion. Even though he was hungry all the time, something had happened to his stomach acids so that he constantly felt on the verge of throwing up. Other people had the same problem, and blamed it on the Big Macs, which the guards delivered to the dorm half-frozen. Daniel himself believed it was psychological and had to do with his job at the station. Whatever the reason, the result was that he was always at odds with his body, which was cold and weak and nauseous and would fumble the simplest task, turning a doorknob or blowing his nose. And it stank, not just at the crotch and the armpits, but through and through. He began to hate himself. To hate, that is, the body he was attached to. He hated the other prisoners just as much, for they were all in more or less the same falling-to-pieces condition. He hated the dorms, and the station, and the frozen ground of the compound, and the clouds that hung low in the sky, with the weight of the winter within them, waiting to fall.

Every night there were fights, most of them inside the dorms. The monitors, if they were watching, seldom tried to intervene. They probably enjoyed it the way the prisoners did, as sport, a break in the monotony, a sign of life.

Time was the problem, how to get through the bleak hours at work, the bleaker hours at the dorm. Never mind the days and weeks. It was the clock, not the calendar, that was crushing him. What to think of in those hours? Where to turn? Barbara Steiner said the only resources are inner resources, and that so long as you were free to think your own thoughts you had as much freedom as there is. Even if Daniel could have believed that, it wouldn't have done him much good.

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Thoughts have got to be about something, they've got to go somewhere. His thoughts were just loops of tape, vain repetitions. He tried deliberately daydreaming about the past, since a lot of the prisoners swore that your memory was a regular Disneyland where you spend days wandering from one show to another. Not for Daniel: his memory was like a box of someone else's snapshots. He would stare at each frozen moment in its turn, but none of them ever came alive to lead the way into a living past.

The future was no better. For the future to be interesting, your desires, or your fears, must have a home there. Any future Daniel could foresee back in Amesville seemed only a more comfortable form of prison, which he could neither wish for nor dread. The problem of what he would do with his life had been with him for as many years as he could remember, but there'd never been any urgency about it. Quite the opposite: he'd always felt contempt for those of his schoolfellows who were already hot on the scent of a "career." Even now the word, or the idea behind it, seemed blackly ridiculous. Daniel knew he didn't want anything that could be called a career, but that seemed perilously near to not wanting a future. And when people stopped having an idea of their future after Spirit Lake, they were liable to let go. Daniel didn't want to let go, but he didn't know what to hang on to.

By the first snowfall, in mid-November, Barbara Steiner was very pregnant and very depressed. People began avoiding her, including the men she'd been having sex with. Not having sex meant she wasn't getting as many Big Macs as usual, so Daniel, who'd been having stomach trouble, would often let her share his, or even give her the whole thing. She ate like a dog, quickly and without any sign of pleasure.

All the talk had gone out of her. They would sit cross-legged on her rolled-up bedding and listen to the wind slam against the windowpanes and rattle the doors. The first full-scale blizzard of the year. Slowly it buttressed the leaky walls with snowdrifts, and the dorm, so sealed, became warmer and more bearable.

There was such a feeling of finality somehow, as though they were all inside some ancient wooden ship that was locked into the ice, eking out rations and fuel and quietly waiting to die. Cardplayers went on playing cards as long as the lights were on, and knitters would knit with the wool they had knit and unraveled a hundred times before, but no one spoke. Barbara, who had already been through two winters at Spirit Lake, assured Daniel that this was just a phase, that by Christmas at the latest things would get back to normal.

Before they did, though, something quite extraordinary happened, an event that was to shape the rest of Daniel's life — and Barbara's as well, though in a far more terrible way. A man sang.

There had been less and less music of any sort lately. One of the best musicians at Spirit Lake, a man who could play just about any musical instrument

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there was, had been released in October. A short time later a very good tenor who was serving twelve years for manslaughter had let go, walking out beyond the perimeter early one Sunday morning to detonate the lozenge in his stomach. No one had had the heart, after that, to violate the deepening silence of the dorms with songs unworthy of those whom they could all still clearly call to mind. The only exception was a feeble-minded migrant woman who liked to drum her fingers on the pipes of the Franklin stove, drumming with a stolid, steady, rather cheerful lack of invention until someone would get fed up and drag her back to her mattress at the far end of the dorm.

Then on the evening in question, a windless Tuesday and bitter cold, that single voice rose from their assembled silence like a moon rising over endless fields of snow. For the briefest moment, for the length of a phrase, it seemed to Daniel that the song could not be real, that it sprang from inside himself, so perfect it was, so beyond possibility, so willing to confess what must always remain inexpressible, a despair flowering now like a costly fragrance in the dorm's fetid air.

It took hold of each soul so, leveling them all to ashes with a single breath, like the breath of atomic disintegration, joining them in the communion of an intolerable and lovely knowledge, which *was* the song and could not be told of apart from the song, so that they listened for each further swelling and subsiding as if it issued from the chorus of their mortal hearts, which the song had made articulate. Listening, they perished.

Then it stopped.

For another moment the silence sought to extend the song, and then even that vestige was gone. Daniel breathed, and the plumes of his breath were his own. He was alone inside his body in a cold room.

"Christ," Barbara said softly.

There was a sound of cards being shuffled and dealt.

"Christ," she repeated. "Couldn't you just curl up and die?" Seeing Daniel look puzzled, she translated: "I mean, it's just so fucking beautiful."

He nodded.

She lifted her jacket off the nail on which it hung. "Let's go outside. I don't care if I freeze to death — I want some fresh air."

Despite the cold, it did come as a relief to be out of the dorm, in the seeming freedom of the snow. They went where no feet had trampled it to stand beside one of the square stone posts that marked the camp's perimeter. If it hadn't been for the glare of the lights on the snow, they might have been standing in any empty field. Even the lights, high on their metal poles, didn't seem so pitiless tonight, with the stars so real above them in the spaces of the sky.

Barbara, too, was considering the stars. "They go there, you know. Some of them."

"To the stars?"

"Well, to the planets, anyhow. But to the stars too for all that anybody knows. Wouldn't you, if you could?"

"If they do, they must never come

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back. It would take such a long time. I can't imagine it."

"I can."

She left it at that. Neither of them spoke again for a long while. Far off in the night a tree creaked, but there was no wind.

"Did you know," she said, "that when you fly, the music doesn't stop? You're singing, and at a certain point you kind of lose track that it's you who's singing, and that's when it happens. And you're never *aware* that the music stops. The song is always going on somewhere. Everywhere! Isn't that incredible?"

"Yeah, I read that too. Some celebrity in the Minneapolis paper said the first time you fly it's like being a blind man who has an operation and can see things for the first time. But then, after the shock is over, after you've been flying regularly, you start taking it all for granted, the same as the people do who've never been blind."

"I didn't *read* it," Barbara said, miffed. "I heard it."

"You mean you flew?"

"Yes."

"No kidding!"

"Just once, when I was fifteen."

"Jesus. You've actually *done* it. I've never known anyone who has."

"Well, now you know two of us."

"You mean the guy who sang in there tonight? You think he can fly?"

"It's pretty obvious."

"I did wonder. It wasn't like anyone else's singing I'd ever heard. There was something ... uncanny about it. But, Jesus, Barbara, you've done it! Why didn't you ever say so before? I mean, Christ Almighty, it's like finding out you shook hands with God."

"I don't talk about it because I only did it that one time. I'm not naturally musical. It just isn't in me. When it happened I was very young, and very stoned, and I just took off."

"Where were you? Where did you go? Tell me about it!"

"I was at my cousin's house in West Orange, New Jersey. They had a hook-up in the basement, but no one had ever got off on it. People would buy an apparatus then the way they'd buy a grand piano, as a status symbol. So when I hooked up I didn't really expect anything to happen. I started singing, and something happened inside my head, like when you're falling asleep and you begin to lose your sense of what size you are, if you've ever had that feeling. I didn't pay any attention to it, though, and went right on singing. And then the next thing I knew I was outside my body. At first I thought my ears had popped, it was as simple as that."

"What did you sing?"

"I was never able to remember. You lose touch with your ego in an ordinary way. If you're totally focused on what you're singing, any song can get you off, supposedly. It must have been something from the top twenty, since I wouldn't have known much else in those days. But what counts isn't the song. It's the way you sing it. The commitment you can give."

"Like tonight?"

"Right."

"Uh-huh. So then what happened?"

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"I was alone in the house. My cousin had gone off with her boyfriend, and her parents were away somewhere. I was nervous and a bit afraid, I guess. For a while I just floated where I was."

"Where was that?"

"About two inches above the tip of my nose. It felt peculiar."

"I'll bet."

"Then I began flying from one part of the basement to the other."

"You had wings? I mean, *real* wings?"

"I couldn't see myself, but it felt like real wings. It felt like a great charge of power in the middle of my spine. *Will* power, in the most literal sense. I had this sense of being totally focused on what I was doing, and where I was going — and that's what the flying *was*. It was as though you could drive a car by just looking at the road ahead of you."

Daniel closed his eyes to savor the idea of a freedom so perfect and entire.

"I flew around the basement for what seemed like hours. I'd closed the basement door behind me, like a dummy, and the windows were all sealed tight, so there was no way to get out of the basement. People don't consider making fairy-holes until they've actually got off the ground. It didn't matter though. I was so small that the basement seemed as big as a cathedral. And almost that beautiful. *More* than almost — it was incredible."

"Just flying around?"

"And being aware. There was a shelf of canned goods. I can still remember the light that came out of the jars of jam and tomatoes. Not really a light, though. It was more as though you could see the life still left in them, the energy they'd stored up while they were growing."

"You must have been hungry."

She laughed. "Probably."

"What else?" he insisted. It was Daniel who was hungry, who was insatiable.

"At a certain point I got afraid. My body — my *physical* body that was lying there in the hook-up — didn't seem real to me. No, I suppose it seemed real enough, maybe even too much so. But it didn't seem mine. Have you ever been to a zoo?"

Daniel shook his head.

"Well, then, I can't explain."

Barbara was quiet for a while. Daniel looked at her body, swollen with pregnancy, and tried to imagine the feeling she couldn't explain. Except in gym class he hadn't paid much attention to his own body. Or to other people's, for that matter.

"There was a freezer in the basement. I hadn't noticed it till at one point the motor started up. You know how there's a shudder first, and then a steady hum. Well, for me, then, it was like a symphony orchestra starting up. I was aware, without seeing it, of the part of the engine that was spinning around. I didn't go near it, of course. I knew that any kind of rotary motor is supposed to be dangerous, like quicksand, but it was so ... intoxicating. Like dance music that you can't possibly resist. I began spinning around where I was, very slowly at first, but there was nothing to keep me from go-

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ing faster. It was still pure will power. The faster I let myself spin, the more exciting, and inviting, the motor seemed. Without realizing it, I'd drifted over to the freezer and I was spinning along the same axis as the motor. I lost all sense of everything but that single motion. I felt like ... a planet! It could have gone on forever and I wouldn't have cared. But it stopped. The freezer shut itself off, and as the motor slowed down, so did I. Even that part was wonderful. But when it had stopped completely, I was scared shitless. I realized what had happened, and I'd heard that that was how a lot of people had just disappeared. *I* would have. Gladly. I would to this day. When I remember."

"What *did* you do then?"

"I went back to the hook-up. Back to my body. There's a kind of crystal you touch, and the moment you touch it, zip, you're back inside yourself."

"And the whole thing was real? You didn't just imagine it?"

"As real as the two of us talking. As real as the snow on the ground."

"And you never flew again after that?"

"It wasn't for want of trying, believe me. I've spent a small fortune on voice lessons, on drugs, on every kind of therapy there is. But I could never reach escape velocity, no matter how I tried. A part of my mind wouldn't join in, wouldn't let go. Maybe it was fear of getting trapped inside some dumb engine. Maybe, like I said before, I just don't have a gift for singing. Anyhow, nothing helped. Finally I stopped trying. And that's the story of my life. And all I can say is, piss on it."

Daniel had the good sense not to try and argue against her bitterness. There even seemed something noble and elevated about it. Compared to Barbara Steiner's, his own little miseries seemed pretty insignificant.

There was still a chance, after all, that *he* could fly.

And he would! Oh, he would! He knew that now. It was the purpose of his life. He'd found it at last! He would fly! He would learn how to fly!

Daniel didn't know how long they'd been standing there in the snow. Gradually, as his euphoria sailed away, he realized that he was cold, that he was aching with the cold, and that they'd better get back to the dorm.

"Hey, Barbara," he said, catching the sleeve of her coat in his numb fingers and giving it a reminding yank. "Hey."

"Right," she agreed sadly, but without stirring.

"We'd better head back to the dorm."

"Right."

"It's cold."

"Very. Yes." She still stood there. "Would you do me a favor first?"

"What?"

"Kiss me."

Usually he would have been flustered by such a suggestion, but there was something in the tone of her voice that reassured him. He said, "Okay."

With her eyes looking straight into his, she slid her fingers under the collar of his jacket and then back around his neck. She pulled him close until their

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faces touched. Hers was as cold as his, and probably as numb. Her mouth opened and she pressed her tongue against his lips, gently urging them apart.

He closed his eyes and tried to let the kiss be real. He'd kissed a girl once before, at a party, and thought the whole process a bit unnatural, if also, at last, rather nice. But he couldn't stop thinking of Barbara's bad teeth, and by the time he'd braced himself to the idea of pushing his tongue around inside her mouth, she'd had enough.

He felt guilty for not having done more, but she seemed not to care. At least Daniel supposed that her faraway look meant she'd got what she wanted, though he didn't really know what that might have been. Even so, he felt guilty. Or at the very least confused.

"Thank you," she said. "That was sweet."

With automatic politeness Daniel answered, "You're welcome." Oddly that was not the wrong thing to say.

Of the man whose song had so wrought upon him, Daniel knew little, not even his real name. In the camp he was known as Gus, having inherited a work shirt across the back of which a former prisoner had stenciled that name. He was a tall, lean, red-faced, ravaged-looking man, somewhere in his forties, who had arrived two weeks ago with a nasty cut over his left eye that was now a puckered scarlet scar. People speculated that he'd been sent up for the fight that had got him the scar, which would have been congruent with his sentence, a bare ninety days. Likely, he'd started the fight on purpose to get that sentence, since a winter at Spirit Lake was more survivable than a jobless and houseless winter in Des Moines, where he came from, and where vagrants, which is what he seemed to be, often died en masse during the worst cold spells.

An ugly customer, without a doubt, but that did not prevent Daniel, as he lay awake that night, from rehearsing, in rather abundant detail, their future relationship, beginning at the moment, tomorrow, that Daniel would approach him as supplicant and maybe, ultimately, even as friend, though the latter possibility was harder to envision in concrete terms, since, aside from his being such a sensational singer, Daniel couldn't see, as yet, what there was to like in Gus, or whoever he was, though it had to be there — his song was the proof. With this faith then in Gus's essential goodness, despite appearances, Daniel (in his daydream) approached the older man (who was, at first, not friendly at all and used some extremely abusive language) and put this simple proposition to him — that Gus should teach Daniel to sing. In payment for his lessons, Daniel agreed, after much haggling and more abuse, to give over to Gus each day his supplementary dinner from McDonald's. Gus was skeptical at first, then delighted at such generous and self-sacrificing terms. The lessons began (this part was rather sketchy, since Daniel had no very clear notion of what, besides scales, voice lessons might entail) and came to an end with a kind of graduation ceremony that took

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place on the evening before Daniel's release. Daniel, gaunt from his long fast, his eyes aglow with inspiration, took leave of his fellow prisoners with a song as piercing and authentic as the song Gus had sung that night. Perhaps (being realistic) this was asking too much. Perhaps that level of mastery would take longer. But the essential part of the daydream seemed feasible, and in the morning, or at the latest after work, Daniel meant to set his plan in motion.

Daniel's life — the life of his own choosing — was about to begin! Meanwhile, once more, he let his wishes soar, like a little flock of birds, over the vistas of an achieved and merited delight, towards the rustling fields of sleep.

The next morning, several minutes before the usual 5:30 reveille, the whistle sounded. While people were still struggling out of their blankets, its shrill ululation stopped. They all realized that someone had let go, and by the simple process of counting off they found out it had been Barbara Steiner, at whose number, 22, there was only a silence.

A man at the other end of the dorm remarked, in a tone of elegy, "Well, she's performed her last abortion."

Most of the prisoners curled back into their mattresses for the moments of warmth still due them, but three of them, including Daniel, got dressed and went outside in time to see the warden's pickup come and cart her body away. She'd gone through the perimeter at just the point where they had talked together the night before.

All the rest of the day, as he tended the vats in the steamy false summer of the station, Daniel tried to reconcile his grief at Barbara's suicide, which was quite genuine, with a euphoria that no other consideration could deplete or noticeably modify. His new-fledged ambition was like a pair of water wings that bore him up to the sunlit surface of the water with a buoyancy stronger than every contrary effort towards a decent, respectful sorrow. Sometimes, indeed, he would feel himself drifting toward tears, but with a sense rather of comfort than of pain. He wondered, even, if there hadn't been more of comfort than of pain for Barbara in the thought of death. Wasn't it possible that that was what their kiss had been about? A kind of farewell, not just to Daniel but to hopefulness in general?

Of course, the thought of death and the fact of it are two different things, and Daniel couldn't finally agree that the fact is ever anything but bad news. Unless you believed in some kind of afterlife or other. Unless you thought that a spark of yourself could survive the ruin of your body. After all, if fairies could slip loose from the knot of the flesh, why not souls? (That had been Daniel's father's view of the matter, the one time they'd discussed it, long ago.)

There was, however, one major stumbling-block to believing in the old-fashioned, Christian type of soul. Namely, that while fairies were aware of fairies in exactly the way that people

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are aware of each other, by the senses of sight and hearing and touch, no fairy had ever seen a soul. Often (Daniel had read) a group of them would gather at the bedside of someone who was dying, to await the moment, wished for or believed in, of the soul's release. But what they always had witnessed, instead, was simply a death — not a release but a disappearance, a fading-out, an end. If there were souls, they were not made of the same apprehensible substance as fairies, and all the theories about the soul that had been concocted over the centuries were probably based on the experiences of the rare, fortunate individuals who'd found their way to flight without the help of a hook-up, like the saints who had floated while they prayed, and the yogis of India, etc. Such was the theory of people who had flown, and their outspokenness was one of the reasons that flying and everything to do with it were the focus of such distress and downright hatred among the Undergoders, who *had* to believe in the soul and all the rest of that, since what else was there for them to look forward to *except* their hereafter? The poor, benighted sons of bitches.

For that matter, what had *he* had to believe in up till now? Not a thing. But now! Now belief had come to him and burned inside him. By the light of its fire all things were bright and fair, and the darkness beyond the range of his vision was of no concern.

His faith was simple. All faiths are. He would fly. He would learn to sing, and, by singing, he would fly. It was possible. Millions of others had done it, and, like them, so would he. He would fly. It was only necessary to hang on to that one idea. As long as he did, nothing else mattered — not the horror of these vats, not the rigors or desolations of Spirit Lake, not Barbara's death, nor the life he'd go back to in Amesville. Nothing in the world mattered except the moment, dim but certain in the blackness of the years ahead, when he would feel wings spring from his immaterial will and he would fly.

Daniel got back to the dorm just as the auction of Barbara Steiner's personal effects was getting under way. They were spread out for inspection, and people were filing past the table with the same skittish curiosity mourners would pay to a dead body. Daniel took his place in the line, but when he got near enough to the table to recognize the single largest item being offered up (besides the ticking and stuffing of her mattress), he let out a whoop of pure, unthinking indignation, pushed his way to the table, and reappropriated his long-lost copy of *The Product Is God.*

"Put that back, Weinreb," said the trustee in charge of the auction, a Mrs. Gruber, who was also, by virtue of her seniority at Spirit Lake, the chief cook and head janitor. "You can bid for that the same as anyone else."

"This book isn't up for auction," he said with the belligerence of righteousness. "It's already mine. It was stolen out of my mattress weeks ago and I never knew who by."

"Well, now you know," said Mrs.

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Gruber complacently. "So put it the fuck back on the table."

"God damn it, Mrs. Gruber, this book *belongs* to me!"

"It was inside Steiner's mattress with the rest of her crap, and it is going to be auctioned."

"If that's where it was, it's because she stole it."

"Begged, borrowed, stole — makes no difference to me. Shame on you, anyhow, for talking that way about your own friend. God only knows what she had to do to get that book."

There was laughter, and one voice in the crowd, and then another, elaborated Mrs. Gruber's implication with specific suggestions. It was flustering, but Daniel stood by his rights.

"It *is* my book. Ask the guards. They had to cut pages out before I could have it. There's probably a record of that somewhere. It *is* mine."

"Well, that may be or it may not, but there's no way you can prove to us that Barbara didn't come by it fair and square. We've only got your word for it."

He could see that she had the majority behind her. There was nothing to be done. He gave her the book, and it was the first item to go to the block. (There weren't that many more.) Then some son of a bitch had the nerve to bid against him, and he had to go up to five Big Macs, almost a full week's dinners, to get it back.

Only after the bidding was done did he realize that the voice he'd been bidding against belonged to Gus.

After the auction was the lottery. Everyone had the number he counted off by at reveille. Daniel was 34, and it came up, winning him back one of his McDonald's vouchers. But not the one for tonight's meal, so that when the guard brought round the dinners that night Daniel had to make do with a bowl of Mrs. Gruber's watery soup and a single slice of white bread smeared with a dab of extended cheese.

For the first time in weeks he felt hungry. Usually dinner left him with a queasy sensation. It must have been the anger. He would have liked to drown old Mrs. Gruber in a kettle of the slop she cooked. And that was just the first of his angers. Peel that away and there were more — against Barbara for stealing his book, against Gus for bidding for it, against the whole lousy prison and its guards, and all the world outside the prison, because they were the ones who had sent him here. There was no way to think about it without going crazy, and there was no way, once you started, to stop.

Clearly, this was not the right time to approach Gus and make his proposition. Instead he played chess with Bob Lundgren, and played so well that (although he didn't finally win) for the first time he put Lundgren on the defensive and even captured his queen.

While they played he was aware, at different times, that Gus, who had never (so far as he knew) paid any notice to him before, was looking at him with a far-off but unwavering attention. Why should that be? It seemed a kind of telepathy, as if Gus knew, without his saying anything, what Daniel had in mind.

* * *

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Daniel got back from work the next day an hour late due to an unusually thorough roadblock just outside the turnoff to E. S. 78. Daniel had been meaning, very first thing, to go to Gus and get it over, but once again the moment wasn't right. Gus and Bob Lundgren were already deep in a game of chess, which Daniel was invited to watch and which for a while he did. But they played slowly, and without a personal stake in the game it was impossible to pay attention.

Daniel decided to return to *The Product Is God.* It was no longer the book he'd begun four months ago. Just the fact that Barbara Steiner had preceded him through its final chapters, leaving behind a spoor of scribbled marginalia, made it seem not quite the harmless trampoline for bright, beside-the-point ideas that it had seemed at first glance.

Dangerous ideas, however, are also, necessarily, more interesting ideas, and Daniel read the book this time with none of his former, lingering pleasure. He read greedily, as though it might be snatched away again before he'd discovered its secret. Again and again, he found ideas that Barbara had lifted out of the book and used in her own arguments, such as the one about purity of heart being to will one thing, which turned out not even to be Van Dyke's idea, but somebody else's centuries ago.

What did seem to be Van Dyke's own idea (and which eventually connected up with the other) was his theory that people live in two completely unrelated worlds. The first was the world that comes in a set with the flesh and the devil — the world of desire, the world people think they can control. Over against this was God's world, which is larger and more beautiful, but crueler too, at least from the limited viewpoint of human beings. The example Van Dyke gave was Alaska. In God's world you just had to give up trying and trust to luck, and you would probably either freeze to death or die of starvation.

The other world, the human world, was more viable, more survivable, but it was also, unfortunately, completely corrupt, and the only way to get ahead in it was to take a hand in the corruption. Van Dyke called this "rendering unto Caesar." The basic problem, then, for anyone wanting to lead a life that wasn't just dog-eat-dog, was how to render unto God. Not, Van Dyke insisted, by trying to live *in* God's world, since that amounted to suicide, concerning which there was an entire chapter called "The Saints Go Marchin' In!" (Here Barbara's underlinings became almost co-extensive with the text, and the margins flowered with breathless assents: "How true!" "Exactly!" "I Agree.") Rather than try to take heaven by storm, Van Dyke suggested that you set yourself a single life-task and stick to it through hell or high water. (Purity of heart, etc.) It made no difference *which* life-task, so long as it was of no material advantage. Van Dyke offered a number of silly possibilities and anecdotes about celebrities who'd found their way to God by such diverse paths as basket-weaving, breeding dachshunds, and translating

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The Mill on the Floss into a language that only computers could read.

Daniel, happy in the discovery of his own life-task, could follow the book easily up to this point, but not beyond. For the notion that all this seemed to be leading up to was that the world was coming to an end. Not God's world — that would always go rolling along — but the world of man, Caesar's world. Van Dyke, like some bearded prophet in a cartoon, was announcing the end of Western Civilization — or, as he styled it, "the Civilization of the Business Man." ("Biz Civ" for short.) What's more, Van Dyke insisted that this was what Biz Civ deserved.

Daniel was not about to admit that *his* world was coming to an end, much less that it ought to. This particular corner of it was nothing to write home about, certainly, but it would be a hard thing for any lad freshly come to a sense of his own high purpose to be told that the firm is going out of business. Who was Reverend Van Dyke to be making such pronouncements? Just because he'd spent a few weeks traveling to such places as Cairo and Bombay for the National Council of Churches' Triage Committee didn't give him the authority to write off the whole damned world! Things might be as bad as he said in the places he'd been to, but he hadn't been everywhere. He hadn't, for one thing, been to Iowa. (Unless the pages the prison censor had torn from the back of the book were about the Farm Belt, which didn't seem likely from the title of the missing chapter printed on the contents page — "Where Peace Prevails.") Iowa, for all its faults, was not about to run into an iceberg and sink, like Van Dyke's favorite example of the fate of Biz Civ, the lost city of Brasilia.

It was an infuriating book. Daniel was glad to be done with it. If that was the way people thought in New York, he could almost understand Undergoders wanting to send in the National Guard and take the city over. Almost, but not quite.

The next day was Christmas Eve, and when Daniel got back from work, a ratty old tree was going up in the dorm under Warden Shiel's personal supervision. Once the limbs were slotted into the trunk and the ornaments had been hung up and, for a final glory, a tinsely angel had been tied to the top, the prisoners were assembled around the tree (Daniel stood in the last row, with the tallest), and Warden Shiel took their picture, copies of which would later be mailed out to relevant relatives.

Then they sang carols. "Silent Night" first, then "O Little Town of Bethlehem," then "Faith of Our Fathers," and finally "Silent Night" again. Three or four strong voices rose above the muddy generality, but, strangely, Gus's was not among these. Daniel screwed up his courage — he'd never liked singing in public (or anywhere else, for that matter) — and sang. Really sang. The man directly in front of him turned his head round briefly to see who was suddenly making such a noise, and even Warden Shiel, sitting there on his folding chair, with his

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right hand resting benignly on the P-W module, seemed to take approving notice. It was as embarrassing in the same way and to the same degree as getting undressed in front of other kids in a locker room. The worst of it was in the imagining. By the time you were doing it, so was everybody else.

After the carols, presents were distributed to the prisoners who had families and friends on the outside to be thinking of them, following which the warden went on to the next dorm to repeat these holiday procedures. The presents, as many as were edible, were then further portioned out. Daniel bolted one slice of his mother's fruitcake and put aside another in his mattress. So long as you assumed some part of the burden towards the dorm's have-nots you could choose whom you were nice to, and the next slice of the fruitcake went, as a matter of course, to Bob Lundgren. The Lundgrens had sent their son a packet of Polaroids taken at their last Thanksgiving dinner, which Bob was studying with baleful incredulity. The fires of his inner rage glowed at such intensity that it was all he could do to say thank you.

Gus was in the farthest corner of the room, doling out crumbled cookies from a large tin box. Somehow Daniel hadn't been expecting that. For some reason, perhaps the slow-healing scar, he'd imagined Gus as utterly bereft and friendless, unless Daniel himself were to become his friend. Daniel made his way over to Gus's corner and, with what diffidence he could summon up, offered him a piece of the cake.

Gus smiled. This close, Daniel, who had a developed judgment of dental work, could see that his perfect upper incisors were actually caps, and of the first quality at that. The lower incisors, as well. All in all, a couple thousand dollars worth of work, and that was only what showed when he smiled.

"The other night," Daniel said, taking the plunge, "when you sang ... I really enjoyed that."

Gus nodded, swallowing. "Right," he said. And then, taking another bite: "This is terrific cake."

"My mother made it."

Daniel stood there, watching him eat, not knowing what else to say. Even as he ate, Gus went on smiling at him, a smile that encompassed the compliment to his singing, his pleasure in the food, and something else besides. A recognition, it seemed to Daniel, of some common bond.

"Here," Gus said, holding out the box of crumbs, "have some of mine, Danny-boy."

Danny-boy? That was several degrees worse than just 'Danny,' and even that he'd always resisted as a nickname. Still, it showed that Gus — without their ever talking to each other before — was aware of him, was even curious about him perhaps.

He took a couple of broken cookies and nodded his thanks. Then, with an uneasy sense of having done the wrong thing, he moved off, bearing the ever-diminishing cake.

Soon enough the goodies were gone and the party was over. The dorm became very quiet. Over intermittent blasts of wind you could hear the

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prisoners singing the same carols in the next dorm. Mrs. Gruber, with her mattress wrapped around her where she sat in front of the Franklin stove, began to croon along wordlessly, but when no one else showed any Christmas spirit, she gave up.

In the next dorm the caroling stopped, and a short while later there was the sound of the pickup's motor turning over. As if he'd been waiting for this signal, Gus got up and ... went over to where the Christmas tree had been. Someone sounded a note on a harmonica, and Gus hummed the same note, rumblingly.

The hush of the room, from having been a hush of gloom, became the hush of fixed attention. Some people went and formed a ring around the singer, while others stayed where they were. But all of them listened as if the song were a newscast announcing a major worldwide disaster.

These were the words of the song Gus sang:

O Bethlehem is burning down
And Santa Claus is dead
But the world continues turning round
And so does my head!
The Tannebaum is bare as bone
And soon I will be too
But who's that lady lying prone
On sheets of baby blue?
Chorus:
Roll over Joe
I've sold my soul
For a fal doll diddle
And a jolly little O
For a fox and a fiddle
And a ho ho ho!

Daniel couldn't tell for quite a while if this were a real song or one that Gus was making up then and there, but when people started to sing along at the part that started "Roll over Joe," he decided it had to be real. There were a lot of songs you never heard in Iowa, radio broadcasts being so strictly controlled.

They sang the song over and over, not just the chorus, which got louder and rowdier with each repetition, but the whole thing. It seemed, if you didn't fasten on the words, like the most exquisite and decorative of Christmas carols, a treasure from a dim and pretty past of sleigh rides, church bells, and maple syrup. Annette, the feeble-minded migrant woman who liked to drum on the stovepipes, got caught up in the excitement and started doing an impromptu strip dressed in the discarded Christmas wrappings, until Mrs. Gruber, who was officially responsible for the collective good behavior of the dorm, put a stop to it.

The festivity lasted till at last the loudspeaker blared out: "All right, assholes, Christmas is over, so shut the fuck up!" With no more warning than that the lights went out, and people had to scramble around in the dark locating their mattresses and spreading them out on the floor. But the song had already served its purpose. The foul taste of Christmas had been washed from every mind.

Everyone got to take off Christmas Day as a holiday except for the workers at E.S. 78, since there was no way

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to tell the termites, squirming forward through their black tunnels on their way to the waiting vats, to slow down because it was Christmas. It was just as well, Daniel told himself. It was easier to lead a rotten life than to lie back and think about it.

That night, when he got back to the dorm, Gus was lying in front of the lukewarm stove. His eyes were closed, but his fingers were moving in slow, fixed patterns across the zipper of his jacket. It was almost as though he were waiting for him. In any case, the moment couldn't be put off any longer. Daniel squatted beside him, nudged his shoulder, and asked him, when he opened his eyes, if they could go outside to talk. He didn't have to explain. There was supposed to be much less chance of the monitors tuning in on conversation if you were out of the dorms. In any case, Gus didn't seem surprised to be asked.

At the midpoint between dorm and latrine, Daniel delivered his message with telegraphic brevity. He'd been thinking of just how to say it for days. "The other night, last night, when I said how much I enjoyed your singing, I actually had something more in mind. You see, I've never heard much real singing before. Not like yours. And it really got to me. And I've decided...." He lowered his voice. "I've decided that I want to learn to sing. I've decided that's what I'm going to do with my life."

"Just sing?" Gus asked, smiling in a superior way and shifting his weight from one leg to the other. "Nothing else?"

Daniel looked up, imploring. He didn't dare spell it out in more detail. The monitors might be listening. They might be recording everything he said. Surely Gus understood.

"You want to fly — isn't that it, really?"

Daniel nodded.

"Pardon?"

"Yes," he said. And then, since there was no reason now not to blurt out anything, he put his own rhetorical question to Gus: "Isn't that why *most* people learn to sing?"

"Some of us do just fall into it, but in the sense you mean, yes, I suppose that's so for most people. But this is Iowa, you know. Flying's not legal here."

"I know."

"And you don't care?"

"There's no law says I've got to live in Iowa the rest of my life."

"True enough."

"And there's no law against singing, even in Iowa. If I want to learn to sing, that's my own business."

"And that's true enough, too."

"Will you teach me?"

"I was wondering where I came into this."

"I'll give you all my vouchers from here on in. I get the full supplement. It costs thirty-five dollars a week."

"I know. I get it too."

"If you don't want to eat that much, you can trade my vouchers for something you do want. It's all I've got, Gus. If I had anything else, I'd offer that."

"But you do, Danny-boy," Gus said. "You've got something I find

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much more appealing."

"The book? You can have that too. If I'd known it was you who was bidding, I wouldn't have bid against you."

"Not the book. I only did that to get your goat."

"Then what *do* you want?"

"Not your hamburgers, Danny-boy. But I *could* go for the buns."

He didn't understand at first, and Gus offered no more by the way of explanation than a strange relaxed sort of smile, with his mouth half open and his tongue passing slowly back and forth behind his capped teeth. When it finally dawned on him what Gus was after, he couldn't believe it. That, anyhow, was what he told himself: *I can't believe it!* He tried to pretend, even then, that he still hadn't got the message.

Gus knew better. "Well, Danny-boy?"

"You're not serious."

"Try me out and see."

"But —" His objections seemed so self-evident he didn't see any need to spell it out beyond that.

Gus shifted his weight again in a single overall shrug. "That's the price of music lessons, kiddo. Take it or leave it."

Daniel had to clear his throat to be able to say that he would leave it. But he said it loud and clear, in case the monitors were taking any of it down.

Gus nodded. "You're probably doing the right thing."

Daniel's indignation finally bubbled over. "I don't need *you* to tell me that! Jesus!"

"Oh, I don't mean holding on to your cherry. You'll lose that one of these days. I mean it's just as well you don't try to become a singer."

"Who says I'm not going to?"

"You can try, true enough. No one can stop that."

"But I won't make it, is that what you mean? Sounds like sour grapes to me."

"Yes, partly. I wouldn't have offered my candid opinion if you'd decided to invest in lessons. But now there's no reason not to. And my candid opinion is that you are a punk singer. You could take voice lessons from here till doomsday and you'd never get *near* escape velocity. You're too tight. Too mental. Too merely Iowa. It's a shame, really, that you got this idea into your head, 'cause it can only mess you up."

"You're saying that from spite. You've never heard me sing."

"Don't have to. It's enough to watch you walk across a room. But in fact I have heard you sing. Last night. That was quite enough. Anyone who can't handle "Jingle Bells" is not cut out for a major career."

"We didn't sing "Jingle Bells" last night."

"That was the point of my joke."

"I know I need lessons. If I didn't, I wouldn't have asked."

"Lessons can only do so much. There has to be a basic capacity. A dog won't learn arithmetic, no matter who his teacher is. You want the particulars? Number one, you're tone deaf. Two, you've got no more sense of rhythm than a road grader. Beyond one and two, there is something still

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more essential missing, which we who have it call 'soul.'"

"Fuck you."

"That might be the beginning, yes."

With which Gus patted Daniel's cheeks smartly with the flat of both hands and smiled a still partly friendly parting smile and left him to a desolation he had never imagined could be his, a foretaste of failure as black and bitter as a child's first taste of coffee. The thing he wanted most in life, the only thing, would never be. Never. The idea was a skull in his hand. He couldn't put it down. He couldn't look away.

A month went by. It was as though the worst single hour of his life, the absolutely blackest moment, were to be stretched out, like railroad tracks on a bed of cinders, to the horizon. Each day he woke, each night he went to bed, he faced the same unrelieved prospect, a bleakness by whose wintry light all other objects and events became a monotony of cardboard zeros. There was no way to combat it, no way to ignore it. It was the destined shape of his life, as the trunk and branches of a pine are the shape of its life.

Gus's eyes seemed always to be following him. His smile seemed always to be at Daniel's expense. The worst torment of all was when Gus sang, which he'd begun to do more often since Christmas Eve. His songs were always about sex, and always beautiful. Daniel could neither resist their beauty nor yield to it. Like Ulysses he struggled against the bonds that tethered him to the mast, but they were the bonds of his own obdurate will and he could not break them. He could only twist and plead. No one noticed, no one knew.

He kept repeating, in his thoughts, the same lump of words, like an old woman telling beads. "I wish I were dead. I wish I were dead." If he ever thought about it, he knew this was only a maudlin imposture. But yet in a way it was true. He did *wish* he were dead. Whether he ever mustered the courage to carry out such a wish was another matter. The means lay readily to hand. He had only, like Barbara Steiner, to step across the perimeter of the camp and a radio transmitter would take care of the rest. One step. But he was chickenshit, he couldn't do it. He would stand there, though, for hours, beside the fieldstone post that marked the possible end of his life, repeating the mindless lie that seemed so nearly true: "I wish I were dead. I wish I were dead. I wish I were dead."

Once, just once, he managed to go past the post, whereupon as he had known it must, the warning whistle started to blow. The sound petrified him. It was only a few yards farther to his wish, but his legs had stopped obeying him. He stood fast in an enchantment of rage and shame, while people filed out of the dorms to see who'd let go. The whistle kept blowing till at last he tucked his tail between his legs and returned to the dorm. No one would talk to him, or even look at him. The next morning, after roll call, a guard gave Daniel a bottle of tranks and watched while he swallowed the first cap-

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sule. The pills didn't stop his depression, but he was never so silly again.

In February, a month before he was due to be released, Gus was paroled. Before he left Spirit Lake he made a point of taking Daniel aside and telling him not to worry, that he could be a singer if he really wanted to and made a big enough effort.

"Thanks," Daniel said, without much conviction.

"It's not your vocal equipment that matters so much as the way you *feel* what you sing."

"Does not wanting to be buggered by some skid row derelict show that I don't have enough feeling? Is that my problem, huh?"

"You can't blame a guy for trying. Anyhow, Danny-boy, I didn't want to leave without telling you not to give up the ghost on my say-so."

"Good. I never intended to."

"If you work at it, you'll probably get there. In time."

"Your generosity is killing me."

Gus persisted. "So I've thought about it, and I've got a word of advice for you. My own last word on the subject of how to sing."

Gus waited. For all his resentment, Daniel couldn't keep from clutching at the talisman being dangled before him. He swallowed his pride and asked, "And what is that?"

"Make a mess of your life. The best singers always do."

Daniel forced a laugh. "I seem to have a good head start at that."

"Precisely. That's why there's still hope for you." He pursed his lips and tilted his head to the side. Daniel backed away from him as though he'd been groped. Gus smiled. He touched a finger to the almost-vanished scar above his eye. "Then, you see, when the mess is made, the music pulls it all together. But remember, the mess has to come first."

"I'll remember. Anything else?"

"That's all." He offered his hand. "Friends?"

"Well, not enemies," Daniel allowed, with a smile of his own that was not more than fifty per cent sarcastic.

At the end of February, only a couple of weeks before Daniel was due to be released, the Supreme Court ruled, in a six-to-three decision, that the measures taken by Iowa and other Farm Belt states to prohibit the distribution of newspapers and related printed material originating in other states was in violation of the First Amendment. Three days later, Daniel was released from Spirit Lake.

On the night before he was to leave the prison, Daniel dreamed that he was back in Minneapolis, standing on the shore of the Mississippi at the point where it was spanned by the pedestrian bridge. But now, instead of that remembered bridge, there were only three-inch-thick steel cables — a single cable to walk on and two higher up to hold on to. The girl with Daniel wanted him to cross the river on these simulated vines, but the span was too wide, the river too immensely far below. Going out even a little way seemed a certain death. Then a policeman offered to handcuff one of his hands to

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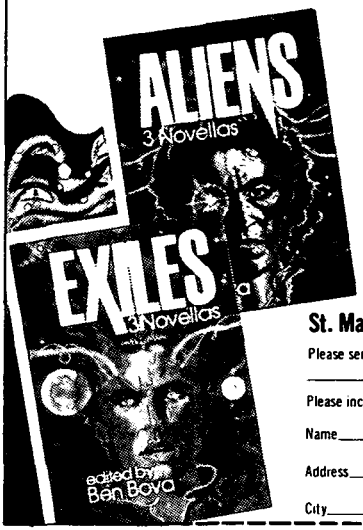

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a cable. With that safeguard Daniel agreed to try.

The cables bounced and swayed as he inched his way out over the river, and his insides frothed with barely controlled terror. But he kept going. He even forced himself to take real footsteps instead of sliding his feet along the cable.

At the midpoint of the bridge he stopped. The fear was gone. He looked down at the river where its storybook blue reflected a single sunlit cloud. He sang. It was a song he'd learned in the fourth grade from Mrs. Boismortier.

"I am the captain of the Pinafore," Daniel sang, "and a right good captain too. I'm very, very good, and be it understood, I command a right good crew."

From either shore choruses of admiring spectators replied, like the faintest of echoes.

He didn't know the rest of the song, so he stopped. He looked at the sky. He was feeling terrific. If it hadn't been for the damned handcuffs, he could have flown. The air that had accepted his song would have accepted his body with no greater difficulty. He was as sure of this as he was that he was alive and his name was Daniel Weinreb.

(to be continued next month)

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Emily Goode is an archetypal female fantasy — Victorian lady in twentieth-century America — whose appeal (I suspect) is the chance it offers for moral cheating; one can have the thrill of being daringly improper (in nineteenth-century terms) while remaining extremely ladylike and staid (in twentieth-century ones). To send her heroine across the modern United States, Moore resorts to what Damon Knight once called an idiot plot (i.e., one that works only because everyone involved in it is an idiot). Emily, supposedly so respectable that she can't mention sex to a suitor, even by euphemism (and she's a widow of thirty, not a maiden of twenty), nonetheless runs *from* authority, not *to* it, the moment she finds herself in trouble, a piece of plotting that not only detracts from her reality as a character but also insures that the novel will be an adventure story, and (therefore) that there will be no real confrontation between the values of the two eras — the only possible point in a story with a time-displaced protagonist.* Either the nineteenth century can win and the heroine reject our time, or we can win and she can ac-

**Unless you want to show geological catastrophe, as in the end of Wells'* The Time Machine.

JOANNA RUSS

Books

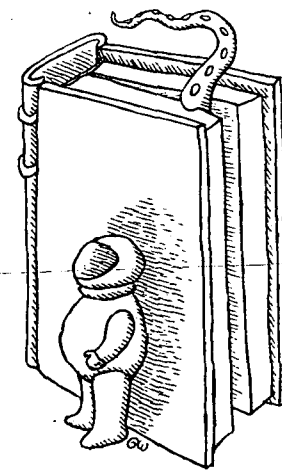
What Happened to Emily Goode After the Great Exhibition, Raylyn Moore, Donning (Starblaze), Norfolk, Va., 1978, $4.95

Rime Isle, Fritz Leiber, Whispers Press, Chapel Hill, N.C., 1977, $10.00

The Year's Finest Fantasy, ed. Terry Carr, Berkley Putnam, New York, 1978

Lord Foul's Bane, Stephen Donaldson, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, New York, 1977; Ballantine, 1978 (paper) $2.50

The Grey Mane of Morning, Joy Chant, George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., London, 1977



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cept the modern world, or (the most interesting possibility, dramatically) she can outdo the twentieth century. Moore chooses the first and dullest alternative; near the end of the book the heroine denounces modern life, and the psychiatrist she's seeing is impressed and agrees with her. That is, the era of child labor, Jim Crow, robber barons, rampant prostitution, and virtual female slavery in marriage feebly condemns the nineteen-seventies for smog, inflation, tasteless food,** television pictures of the moon, unisex clothing, and "wars fought without reason and without honor." The list is an odd one: inflation has been going on for eight centuries, smog is surely preferable to tetanus, and if Moore wants reasonable and honorable wars, one can only send her (with an ironic grin) to a history of the entire world, which she may open at any page she chooses. (The Civil War, for example, was not fought over slavery, though Moore seems to think it was; emancipation was something of an improvisation by Lincoln — who believed, by the way, in black inferiority.)

The trouble is that *Emily Goode* doesn't see the nineteenth century as a real era in which real people lived, suffered, enjoyed and died. (Neither does Bradbury, but he connects his idyll with childhood, which is everybody's Golden Age.) This might not matter if its twentieth century were real, but the characters that impossible-stereotype-Emily meets on her travels are even worse clichés than she: the philosophical cabbie and his whiny, vulgar, insensitive wife (both with fake Brooklyn accents); the swinging, divorced, wealthy ad-man who talks about male prerogatives in intercourse (to a woman he's trying to seduce!); the mannish, criminal Lesbian (who is both an orphan and an ex-WAC sergeant), and the colorful, liberal lawyer who talks feminism on one page and praises gallantry on another. In short, the book is riddled with class snobbery, sexism, and homophobia, even though Moore tries to "redeem" her characters by telling us that the vulgar, insensitive wife is *really* sorry for her husband's death, that the exploitative swinger isn't *really* a cold-blooded rapist, and that the Lesbian is *really* pitiable, all of which, alas, only adds condescension to the bigotry. Moore judges her women much more harshly than her men, without, I think, being aware that she's doing so; the book shows one incompetent woman professional (a lawyer) who is squashed by a *black*

***Food also without the germs of tuberculosis, undulant fever, typhoid, and botulism.*

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Federal judge — brought out triumphantly on p. 124 to validate the book's liberal credentials. Moore dedicates the book to her two daughters, who will, I hope, spurn it for the cultural prussic acid that it is and instead instantly read Juliet Mitchell's *Woman's Estate,* which will tell them why the initial fantasy of *Emily Goode* is so compelling (the female role, argues Mitchell, is in fact anachronistic). I would be less cross if the book were better written, but Moore shows her heroine's nineteenth-century propriety by a stiff, abstruse, polysyllabic style which leads to howlers like "a sensible mood of calm," "Emily lost the quality of immediacy in her resolve," "a vendor peered boredly from a booth," and the ghastly awkwardness of the one sentence that does convey a sense of wonder (a plane trip): "Joshua had stopped the sun; who had ripped loose the seam which joined the land to the sky?"

Nehwon addicts will probably like *Rime Isle,* though I suspect Fritz Leiber didn't. Everything's here: strange scenery, properly lurid monsters and gods, lots of (sometimes aimless) action, two beautiful women (indistinguishable from Leiber's other pairs in other books), but the whole business is tired; it starts with a typical mid-life crisis and ends with both heroes in debt and (almost) married. In between, two gods intimately connected with Fafhrd and the Mouser are dismissed to nonexistence, loose ends from other Nehwon stories are carefully tied up, the heroes learn that adventures are for idiots, and a major war is not fought, but averted. There is a fascinating wizard with a fine name who does almost nothing and more imitation late Jacobean than usual, used here as a form of telegraphy:

> "Would Mingol mariners fight fiercely 'gainst their own in a pinch? Mingols were ever deemed treacherous. Yet 'twas always good to have some of the enemy on your side, the better to understand 'em. And from them he might even get wider insight into the motives behind the Mingol excursions naval." (14)

In books as well as T.V., series tend to decay after their templates satisfactorily establish who's who and what's what. I wonder if the very early "Adept's Gambit" was not the last of the Fafhrd-Mouser stories in which something really happened humanly, that is, in which somebody actually changed. *Rime Isle* has one good joke, the Mingol shamans' Talmudic debate as to whether it "is sufficient to

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burn a city to the ground or must it also be trampled to rubble?" and one genuinely sinister and poetic incident — Odin's noose — but everything happens much too fast and, except for some sparkling scenery, Leiber (I suspect) is trying hard to get rid of both heroes. *Rime Isle* may be his way of doing it. The novel has very much the air of an intelligent grownup (much more at home in a civilized fantasy like *Our Lady of Darkness*) trying, for the last time, to please the kids. The kids may have noticed; *Rime Isle* is put out not by a major publisher, but in a special edition by Whispers Press, with pictures by Tim Kirk.

The Year's Finest Fantasy is a good collection with only one outright failure, a clumsy piece of grue by Stephen King called "The Cat from Hell" which doesn't belong here, though King's name (he's the author of *Carrie*) makes for good jacket copy. "Probability Storm" by Julian Reid is pleasant enough but very derivative; "Getting Back to Where It All Began" by Raylyn Moore is the essence of *F&SF* idyllic pastoral with nice names; and T. Coraghessan Boyle's "Descent of Man" is the kind of male competition-inferiority fantasy modern high culture deals in a lot ("his is bigger than mine"), verbally polished but full of unearned clichés — it appeared, in *The Paris Review* and not one of ours, you will be glad to hear. Another pastiche, youthfully energetic and rather appealing, is Steven Utley's and Howard Waldrop's "Black as the Pit from Pole to Pole," which gives Frankenstein's creature further adventures and a beautiful, blind lady to fall in love with. Without the charm of the borrowings, however (Lovecraft, Henley, Poe, Melville, Symmes, (Mary) Shelley, Edgar Rice Burroughs and doubtless others I missed), the story would not make it, and although it's genuinely enjoyable to watch the Malaprop Kids excitedly rummaging through The Classics, somebody should've warned them against putting "erstwhile" and "displacement activity" in the same sentence (except in straight parody) and that "arcing" and "stomped" are not words. There are other screamers, my favorite being "willing to cope with the basin's large predators on a moment-to-moment basis." There is also an Expository Lump on p. 91 that should've been given to the brontosaur (on p. 82) to eat.

In the top half of the anthology is "The Bagful of Dreams," a Cugel the Clever story by Jack Vance as cynical, elegant, and sour as the best of them (Vance appears not at all bored or stale). Avram Davidson's "Manatee Gal, Ain't

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You Comin' Out Tonight" is ostensibly a horror story but really a beautifully detailed re-creation of a tiny Central American country he calls British Hidalgo, including a fine ear for accents. Woody Allen's wispy, very funny "The Kugelmass Episode" is perfect Woody Allen ("'My God, I'm doing it with Madame Bovary!' Kugelmass whispered to himself, 'Me, who failed freshman English!'"), and "Growing Boys" by Robert Aickman is a strange, very British story whose exoticism may be due simply to its appearing on this side of the ocean. I can't shake off the impression that "Robert Aickman" is a pseudonym and the author is a woman, since the tale's subject is the cannibalistic horror of family life, from which the Everywoman heroine is offered two escapes: decamping with another, friendly woman (the heroine dreams at one point that they're happily climbing the Himalayas together) and an ideal, protective, substitute father. The ending is the kind mothers — but not fathers — dream of.

Harlan Ellison is a born dramatist. His gift of creating extreme situations and of communicating the intense emotion created by them is quintessentially a dramatist's gift — *all* situations in drama are extreme (including Chekhov's, although the seemingly discursive texture of Chekhov's plays tends to hide this), and in drama character is an attribute of action and not vice-versa.* One of the problems I think Ellison has had as a short-story writer is that there is no narrative scrape his dramatic gifts can't get him out of, which means in practice that until fairly recently he's stayed with the kind of subject that can be dealt with dramatically. (I have seen analyses of "Pretty Maggie Moneyeyes" and "The Ticktockman" which thoroughly — and mistakenly — demolished them from the point of view of novelistic social realism. Then that ultra-novelistic novel, *Dahlgren,* appeared and fandom thoroughly demolished it — just as mistakenly — from the opposite point of view.) But without anybody's noticing particularly, Ellison has begun to move into areas drama can't cover. "Jeffty is Five" is just such a story. It is, I think, Ellison in transition. On one page there is

Ellison wrote the best script Star Trek *ever did, "City on the Edge of Forever" (even better in his original version) and the best I've ever seen on* The Outer Limits *— the one about the soldier from the future; "Demon with a Glass Hand" tries for much more and therefore doesn't cover its subject with such absolute thoroughness. (I would almost swear he had a hand in "The Inheritors"; does anyone know?)*

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a phrase as precise as "gentle dread and dulled loathing," on another, "I realized I was looking at it without comprehending what it was for a long time," which fails because it's sloppy — though I admit that surprise (the easiest emotion to induce in drama) is the toughest to evoke in prose narrative.

In short, Ellison was too impatient or busy or involved with his material to sit down and pick the verbal fluff out of "Jeffty" — though again and again he's demonstrated that if he wants to, he can. There are times I could wish a talent-sabbatical on him, if only to force him to handle the printed word as print, not spoken voice ("Jeffty" is full of the italics and repetitions that are the devices of the story-teller, not the word-writer). Bradbury, also a dramatist at heart (and with less to say than Ellison) is one of the most economical writers alive and therefore one of the most effective. A singing teacher once told me that voices are not made but carefully (layer by layer) unwrapped. "Jeffty" is still half-smothered in wrappings (largely because the material isn't the kind that can be treated dramatically), and the problem now is to unwrap him, that is, to make every sentence as clean as the first. Nobody knows popular culture better than Ellison and nobody loves it and hates it as he does. I couldn't imagine Jeffty any more than I can fly, but I do know that the last sentence of the story should be "They die from new ones." And I suspect, hopefully, that the story refuses to smooth itself out precisely because the material is so alive and charged with emotion, which means it may have to be wrestled with but the wrestling will be worth it. Ellison ought not to be writing "the best of the year" but something much better, and although he may not like the idea of his works being taught in Lit. 101 a hundred years from now, I do. Only the preservative of style can make things not only enter people's heads and hearts, but stay there. I hope he does it.

Fantasies like Ellison's, Moore's, or Davidson's have nothing to do with "heroic fantasy," that form of twentieth-century escapism pillaged from genuine medieval culture. Samuel Delany is, I believe, writing something he calls sword and sorcery at this very moment and may revolutionize the genre for all we know, but until then rocky caverns full of rank stench inhabited by evil entities with red eyes, sentences like "Peace lay over the realm of the Wide Land," and other signs of Secondary Universes in the brewage only send me into fits of gig-

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gling followed by stupefying boredom. (I was not so sensitive before the eighth — or was it tenth? — laser battle in *Star Wars,* from which I had to be awakened several times, or so my friends tell me; I have only a confused and whimpering recollection of the last hour of the film.) George Bernard Shaw once said that those who have grappled face to face with reality have little patience with fools' paradises, and another political radical, Virginia Woolf, stated flatly that "books of sensation and adventure" quickly grow dull because they can only present the same kind of thrill over and over:

> "...it is unlikely that a lady confronted by a male body stark naked, wreathed in worms where she had looked, maybe, for a pleasant landscape in oils, should do more than give a loud cry and drop senseless. And women who give loud cries and drop senseless do it in much the same way."*

Woolf was talking about Mrs. Radcliffe, but when the sensation is heroic virtue instead of brooding terror, things get no better; as Suzy Charnas once wrote to me about the fixity of Lewis' and Tolkien's characters: "Arrowshirt, son of Arrowroot, son of Stuffed Shirt, THIS IS YOUR VIRTUE!" In short, fiction's only real subject is the changes that occur in human beings, and since real change is the one thing that "heroic fantasy" (with its aim of wish-fulfillment) must avoid at all costs, such fantasies often begin with a delicious sense of freedom and possibility, only to turn dismayingly familiar and stale unless well salted with comedy (Leiber's technique)* or adorned with rapidly changing, interesting, and colorful scenery. C.S. Lewis, who is very good at scenery, manages in this way partly to disguise the dreadful predictability of his Narnia books — i.e., aristocrats stay noble, dwarves cunning, animals loyal, and peasants stupid unless pushed by God or the Devil. After the marvelous opening of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe,* Lewis can find no story for his world but Christian myth imposed like a straitjacket over the plot and no antagonist but that old sexist stereotype, the proud, independent, and therefore wicked, woman. Nor does George MacDonald fare any bet-

*Virginia Woolf, "Gothic Romance," Granite and Rainbows: Essays, *Harcourt Jovanovich (Harvest), N.Y., 1975, pp. 58-59.*

**Moorcock substitutes the purple perversities of a very-late-in-the-day Byronism with much less success.*

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ter. What to do in these wonderful Other worlds is always the problem,** for although reality can't be escaped (it being all there is), it can be impoverished and sooner or later the mechanical predictability of the whole awful business sends you back to such comparatively heartening works as "The Penal Colony" or "The Death of Ivan Ilyitch" where there is humanity, contingency, and reality.

The desire for escape is understandable. It's the supply that's spurious. Unfortunately, after Tolkien had wrung the last drop of meaning-freighted landscape out of an extremely tiny genre, the cry went up, "Now we know how to do it!" and another, "There's money in it!" and the flood began.

With orthodox heroic fantasy, one judges the quality not of books but of guided daydreams: *Lord Foul* is a daydream of Byronic suffering and self-importance in which weakness is strength and vice versa and the hero's terrible secret is leprosy (if only he'd explained it patiently in Chapter Five, three-quarters of the plot would be rendered useless and much lurid suffering avoided, but I daresay Donaldson's attitude towards probability isn't mine). It's an energetic, crude, lurid work with Tolkienesque echoes, evil entities with names like "Drool Rockworm," and a brow-smiting playing with disease only possible to the young and healthy. *Grey Mane* is a daydream of primitive, idyllic, nomad life which celebrates the beauty, prowess, wonder, glory, and general worthiness of male persons in the way that only a woman can do (men know better). I hope that some day its British author will try to claim some of this admirableness for herself, but remembering Henry James' remarks about Englishwomen and their brothers (in *Portrait of a*

****It is in* Star Wars, *whose plot events are (to put it mildly) derivative. In LeGuin's Earthsea trilogy — i.e., the non-Otherness — of what at first appears to be Other. (This is the subject of* The Left Hand of Darkness.) *The first book of the trilogy ends with an explicit statement of this position: the young wizard, Ged, having called up an evil shadow and pursued it across the world, finally confronts it and is able to call it by its true name,* which is "Ged." *It's part of himself and must be incorporated, not destroyed. LeGuin's position on "evil" is absolutely opposite to Lewis's, Tolkien's, or any other heroic fantasists I know; it's close to existentialism or psychyoanalysis. LeGuin is interested in illuminating and confronting reality via an invented world, not escaping from the real into an invented world. Thus she welcomes tragedy, which "heroic fantasy" avoids like the plague except in the ersatz form of Moorcockian Byronism.*

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Lady), I doubt it. This daydream is much more smoothly crafted and self-consistent than the other, but both are impenetrably formulaic, ahistorical, full of magic (*Foul)* or religious ritual (*Mane)* and almost totally devoid of economics and work, through *Mane* makes a couple of shies at trade (the only kind of work middle-class people are familiar with). Both make vague gestures in the direction of ecology, and Donaldson tries to be liberal about women but clearly doesn't know how. Chant (ever the one for self-immolation) includes in her daydream an independent, bitchy girl who dislikes male control and doesn't want to spend her life pregnant; she is "afraid of the life of a woman" and ends up dead, while the self-effacing, suffering heroine gets the man.

Lord Foul is ersatz tragedy; *Grey Mane* is ersatz history, and both are stone dead. Both are parts of a series, not surprising since life ends (its final change) and art ends (its final satisfaction) while escape — never quite satisfying enough — is condemned to tread over and over the same barren ground.

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"For some reason I keep thinking it's Wednesday!"

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This very short tale about an unfortunate professor who strays from the basics and gets what he deserves is written by Jim Hoetker, who admits to being a professor himself (of English education at Florida State University). This is his first fiction sale.

Sorcerese

by JAMES HOETKER

The class was called "An Introduction to Drama in Education," and it was the best part of Professor Smith's year when he taught it. His dozen students sat with him on the floor in a circle. "Today," Smith began, "I want to do some work with gibberish. What is gibberish?"

"Nonsense talk," someone said, "meaningless syllables."

"Urschul da firo uliripon zo? Walbarso din doh nan dibo, nha?" Smith queried. He was very good at this and enjoyed putting on a show. "Gibberish can be very useful with beginners in drama, especially when they are inhibited or not very verbal. When I'm working with younger kids, I call it Sorcerese. Deborah," he said to a well-scrubbed young lady, "tell me in gibberish about something frightening that happened to you."

"I'm not sure I can," said Deborah. "Um ... ah da ba da ... um arda fa so...." She mimed some sort of tale about being strangled, with the gibberish as sound effects. But as Smith went around the circle, giving each of them similar tasks, the students relaxed and got more fluent.

"All right," said Smith, "now let's try some choral Sorcerese. I'll give you a phrase and you all repeat it after me in chorus, with my inflections. Here we go. Ardbrig ee-yoo FA ordrina FA saloo nup."

"Ardbrig ee-yoo FA ordrina FA saloo nup," everyone said, more or less in unison.

"Fonvurg ga-ON ga vardagata ON na-sha."

"Fonvurg ga-ON ga vardagata ON na sha."

A few more times and the game began to generate its own energy and the responses came more swiftly and surely. "Now close your eyes," Smith said. "Just con-

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centrate on my voice." He took a deep breath and began intoning in a rhythmic bass: "Abrozzl gat umlil la mach ark vooooo GAY-bock RAA-mach am orlah."

"ABROZZL GAT MULIL LA MACH DA MACH ARK VOOOOOO," boomed a growling scratchy falsetto, overriding the other responses. As Smith opened his eyes to locate the culprit, his nostrils were assaulted by a reek like a thousand dying whales simultaneously breaking wind. The sour, fetid fog that filled the room swirled away to reveal a dark, squarish, dog-sized beast scuttling tentatively around the circle. Stumpy, hairless, having neither head nor tail, face nor eyes, the creature halted abruptly in front of Smith and reared up on two twisted taloned legs, revealing an underside devoted entirely to a moist, black, many-jawed maw. Smith's last short single shriek was loyally echoed by his students.

Smith had, bemused investigators concluded, taken one too many stupid chants.

Coming Up in 1979

We have an extraordinary inventory of stories at the moment, with an interesting balance between old hands and writers newer to the field. To name just a few: Michael Shea, Poul Anderson, Grania Davis, Robert Bloch, John Kessel, Manly Wade Wellman, Orson Scott Card, Robert F. Young, Freff, Keith Roberts, Marta Randall, Ed Bryant, Philip Jose Farmer, Richard Cowper, Lee Killough, Joanna Russ and many others.

Next month: part two of Thomas Disch's new novel "On Wings of Song."

October 1979: a 30th anniversary retrospective double issue, 320 pages, tentative newsstand price is $2.50.

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This story bears an interesting comparison with Stephen Dixon's "A Home Away From Home." They are quite different in that Dixon's is pure fantasy, while Mr. Kelly's tale is solid sf set in a research community of the 21st century. And yet both stories concern the problems of aging; more remarkable is the fact that the solutions of the protagonists are so similar.

Not To The Swift

by JAMES PATRICK KELLY

Morris Knox was swabbing toilets when he heard the rumble of a car in the elevator banks. At first the old man paid no attention to the sound; his attention had wandered far from the antiseptic lavatory.

He started at the sound of the warning chime in the foyer. Glancing in alarm at his watch, he hurried out to meet his visitor. It was Madeline, maintenance senior for his unit. She put a hand on the elevator door and watched him approach with the impatience of a mother for her slow child. Knox had seen that look before and hated it. He was thirty-two years older than Madeline Bianchi.

"You still here?"

"I'm finished," he said.

"You have to move, Knox. You make the unit look bad."

He shrugged.

"I'm giving twenty-six to Mildred," she said wearily. "When you finish here, come down to my office." She dropped her hand and the door slid shut.

"I *am* finished," he said to the silent door. He shook his head and went back to the lavatory.

Morris Knox was a short, wiry man who had just begun to lose his race with time. He still moved with some of the old, nervous energy, limping slightly now because the prosthetic leg was not quite a perfect fit. His features contradicted his restless body; they were set in a sere mask, invulnerable to emotion.

In 1985, Knox Associates had been selected by the Environmental Protection Agency as designers of Century Towers, a prototype research community, and Morris Knox had selected himself as project architect. When he and his family took refuge in the sealed, self-sufficient complex during the cancer riots eight years later, he

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became its first maintenance senior. Now there was no need for his design skills. His contribution to the Towers these days was to water the plants and clean up messes that younger citizens made.

He wheeled the service dolly into an elevator and rode down to twenty-two, where he stored the equipment and changed out of his worksuit.

Madeline's office had once been his, although now he could scarcely recognize it. The bone-white walls had been stripped of decoration; the desk was uncluttered. Madeline, like many of those who had grown up in the Towers, was fanatic about dirt and disorder. She groomed herself meticulously: her auburn hair was cropped short, her face always seemed newly scrubbed, even her worksuit was spotless. This had always annoyed Knox, who believed that since the work was dirty, the workers should get dirty, too. But Madeline had been a hard worker and was now a fine senior. Knox was secretly proud of her ability since he had trained her for the job himself.

As he settled into a chair, Madeline picked a computer chip from her desktop file and slipped it into the terminal. The printer hummed and disgorged a sheet of plastic. She passed it to him wordlessly.

It was a memo from Roberts in Manpower Programming. He commended Knox for his long and valued service. He said that it was unfair that a man of Knox's age and accomplishment work a full shift at menial labor. Manpower Programming was pleased to be able to lower his work quota to one-half standard shift, four hours a day. Of course, the memo continued, his new work status put him below the minimum requirements of labor credits for a private cubicle. He was therefore instructed to transfer his possessions to the geriatrics dormitory at a time convenient to his senior and himself.

Knox had a trick for avoiding pain. He imagined himself in a safe future in the company of close friends. He then lived each difficult moment in the present from a distance, as if it were part of an anecdote to be repeated, then dismissed to sympathetic smiles. Knox closed his eyes and produced the illusion, but the trick failed him.

He was afraid of the geriatrics dormitory. He knew too many people there, people who had inverted the natural rhythms of life. They existed for the past, having fixed an immutable and hopeless future. Morris Knox was not one to back into death. He was still running, however blindly, toward some unknown final goal.

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Madeline was saying something. "... you should know something. I asked to have your quota reduced. But not this way. They're giving you a raw deal."

"Thanks."

She bit her lip and colored. "I had to think of the unit. None of us have gotten bonus rec time this year. Because of you. You know I'm right. I know you do. When you were senior you did the same damn thing to Jimmy Packer."

"What if I get work in another unit?"

She looked at him pityingly. "Doing what?"

Knox stood and walked stiffly to the door.

"I'm sorry, Morris. I want to help. I ... I owe you. But you have to face things." It was not an order; she was pleading with him.

"Later." He turned away from her and escaped into the hall, shutting the door behind him as if it were made of china.

He found Dr. Cheddi Jain in his office on thirty-one just after the start of the first shift. Jain scowled as Knox stopped by the carrel. The dark-skinned man spoke rapidly with the clipped inflections of Hindi overlaid with the King's English.

"The lab was not properly cleaned last night. Again."

"I'll take care of it tonight."

There was a moment of silence. Jain gazed at him indifferently.

"Manpower is cutting my work quota. I need to make up a half shift."

Jain turned his calculator off and swiveled around in his chair to face Knox. His mustache was the color of charcoal turning to ash. He played with it reflectively.

"Sit. Why do you tell me this?"

"I've heard that you were looking for volunteers. For experimental work."

"You're volunteering then. For a half-shift credit?"

Knox nodded.

"File access code?"

Knox repeated the numbers and Jain punched the code into his desk terminal.

"Married, wife and child deceased. Yes. Harvard, good. Hmmm." Jain muttered as he scanned the five sheets of plastic that contained the sum of Morris Knox's life. "You lost ... let's see ... the right leg to cancer of the bone marrow. Do you have pain?"

"Occasionally."

"It might come more often. You may be too old, but we can find that out right now. Just a simple test. If you pass, I'll put you on. Temporary though — no permanent positions for volunteers. And, as I say, the experiment could be unpleasant for you. But

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there's no danger. Let me emphasize that."

Knox sat impassively, assenting in his silence.

"Agreed then. Excellent." Jain held out his hand and Knox shook it. "A little explanation then. We have an apparatus which stimulates the temporal lobes of the brain and releases eidetic imagery to the consciousness. The technique was first used by Penfield back in the fifties. So we know pretty much what to expect. During the experiment you will seem to relive an event from your past, but you will also be aware of the present and your place in it. While on the apparatus you will answer my questions. This is important. Afterwards you may have headaches. We'll give you something for them. Do you understand?"

Knox nodded.

"Then come with me, please."

Jain unlocked a door marked "Psychobiology" and sat Knox down in a chair built into the laboratory's computer bank. He taped electrodes to Knox's forehead and wrists.

"Are you going to start right in?" Knox said uneasily.

Jain's hands were cool and deft. He continued without acknowledging Knox.

"I have other things to do this morning."

Jain finished working on him and turned to the computer. He replied with back turned, as if addressing the display circuitry.

"This is the test. The first volunteer blacked out after only a few minutes on the apparatus. The second experienced her memories so vividly that she ignored my questions. Should you suffer either of these symptoms, I won't be able to use you. Understood?" He returned to Knox's side for a final check of the electrodes. "Set? I'll give you a very short flash."

Knox was so tired that his bones seemed to ache. He had just spent four straight shifts overseeing repairs to the elevators in Tower I; he had not slept in nearly two days. As he stepped into the cubicle he sensed what had happened. Martha was collapsed on the daybed, her back to him. She sobbed quietly, but that low murmuring lament seemed to fill the tiny room with its misery. He knelt and put his hand gently on her hair. He stopped breathing.

"Knox! Where are you, Knox?"

She turned. Her mouth opened, closed. No sound came out.

"I'm in my cubicle. With my wife."

Finally the words came out in a flood. "He's dead, Moe. He's dead. Ben's dead."

Numbness pumped through

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him. He stared at the dark spots her tears made on the pillow.

"What's happening?"

"I'm with my wife."

He felt his insides dissolving in acid. His son was dead. He had not been there.

"Say something to me, Moe. Make me understand. Tell me why he had to die."

"Knox!"

"My wife is crying. He's dead, the boy. She's crying. Leave us alone."

"Oh my God, I can't help it. It shouldn't ... not ... to him. Ben!" He held her in his arms, feeling her body shudder with continual explosions of grief. He wanted to tell her something, but he was afraid to show....

"And there you are," said Jain. "Now it's over. You're disoriented. Take a minute to get your bearings."

There was an itching on Knox's face. He rubbed at it; his hand came away wet. I had no tears then, he thought bitterly. No time for tears.

"It's too bad," Jain said as he removed the electrodes, "that your first experience on the apparatus was unpleasant. One thing we hope to accomplish is to teach you to select and control your memories."

Knox sprang from the chair as soon as he was free. The room spun crazily. Only the tableau in his head was real. Jain caught him and sat him back down.

"Rest. It's more powerful than you think. We can talk until you feel better. What did you remember?"

"My son is ... was dead. It was not just a memory — it was real." Knox was trembling. "I can't talk about it right now."

Jain perched on the edge of his desk and touched his mustache. "This work is important to me, to the Towers. If we can understand the mechanism of memory storage and retrieval, we can reclaim part of what has been lost. They say that we'll be able to survive outside again once the cancer project is finished. Your memories will be important to those who leave the Towers then. But there is no disgrace for you in backing out, if you do it now. Stay and you will be hurt like this again. I guarantee it."

The psychobiologist smiled sympathetically. Knox thought that his teeth were too big for his face; he looked more fierce than kind. "It's the dorms; isn't it?" he said. "I can tell that you don't volunteer freely. No one does. But they're not so bad. Maybe you want to forget about this?"

Knox sat up a little straighter in the chair. He took out a handkerchief, blew his nose and wiped the wetness from the corners of his

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eyes. Slowly the muscles of his face hardened into their familiar set.

By the time he left Jain, the first shift, his free period, was half gone. Normally he would have returned to his cubicle to read or work at his drafting board, a relic of happier days. Since Martha had died he had been designing magnificent and useless buildings as a hobby; boredom was his client. But the cubicle did not seem the haven of peace and purpose that it had been. He crossed over to Tower I anyway. He had missed the endshift meal, and although he was not hungry, he needed someplace to be alone.

He was sitting in the corner of the cafeteria, playing with a salad that he did not want, when Madeline came in. She picked him out immediately in the nearly empty room and strolled over to his table.

"I've been looking for you, Knox. I want to talk about your move."

He stuffed a forkful of salad into his mouth. She sat down. They watched each other as he chewed slowly.

"Come on now, Knox. Don't be like this."

He collected another mouthful on his fork. Madeline placed her hand firmly on his arm.

"I said I was sorry."

"That's right. You just did what you had to do." He shook her hand from his arm.

"Besides," she said, looking hurt, "the dorm isn't that bad. I went down after you left and talked to Torres, the senior. He told me that since you were still working, you'd get special privileges. He even has a place for your drafting table."

"I'm not going to the dorm, Madeline."

"Not going? But you have to."

"I went to see Cheddi Jain. I volunteered."

She gazed at him in astonishment. "Why? You've heard the stories."

"Don't worry," he said dryly. "I'll keep up with my work."

"Yes, I'm sure you will, Knox. I'm sorry, I didn't know you felt this way — I'd better go."

"You'd better."

She stood quickly, as if trying to distance herself from him. "I don't care if you blame me, you ungrateful old bastard. What are you to me that I should care? It won't bother me if you get hurt, or go crazy. Because if you do, I'll bounce you right out of the unit. Okay? That's what you wanted to hear, wasn't it?" She jammed her chair back to the table so hard that it knocked the processed greens from his bowl. Seeing the mess only made her angrier, and she stalk-

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ed off without a word.

Knox pushed the scattered greens off the table and onto the tray with his hand, carried it over to the disposer and dumped it. Almost second shift, he thought, glancing at his watch. He could go back to his cubicle and sleep straight through to third and not think about what had happened. Suddenly he was very tired.

In the first phase of the experiment Jain wanted him to learn to set off the memory response by himself. Knox sat in the chair every day for three months and reminisced aloud. He was unable to sustain the eidetic illusion on his own, however. Facts, faces, some isolated sensory impressions were the best he could manage. But when Jain turned on the stimulator, the past shone as brightly as the midday sun, and it was the lab, the Towers, the strangled world of 2014 that flickered dimly in his mind.

He relived —

—The DeVeau School was dedicated on a raw spring day. A drizzle slowly dissolved the workers' footprints, captured in the frozen mud. The crowd of functionaries stamped, horselike in their impatience, as they pressed toward the school's entrance. Finally the last of them entered to hear Martin Carr, his boss, take credit for the design. Knox stood alone admiring his first building. He touched a dark stain on the wall where the brick had absorbed the rain. It was cold, hard and rough; it was real. At that moment the building ceased to be an endless and chaotic process and became for him a permanent part of the world. The year of construction collapsed to a point in time, and Knox was suddenly astonished to see his ideas transformed into concrete and brick. Where he decided a wall should be, there it was. Should a window penetrate the facade over here? It did, at his command. If only Carr had not insisted on those silly hooded vents which stuck out from the roof like warts, this building would be a work of art. Nonetheless, he looked upon his own design and was satisfied.

— He sprinted into third place. All noise except the tapping of his flats on the permatrack and the shuddering wheeze of his lungs faded. Sweat streaked off his brow and burned his eyes. His legs were lead and he was in second place. Coming out of the final turn, he tapped some reserve he had never known before, a fusion of misery, greed and courage. He closed in on the finish line like a falling stone hurtling to the ground. The shouts of his teammates were as faint as the whisper of a conch. He saw the finish line, lunged at it and tumbled in a pile of nerveless arms and

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legs at the heels of the winner.

— He heard the knock but made no move to answer it; he was too busy. The door opened and his son stepped into the office. Ben was smiling, a smile so huge and happy that it seemed likely to crack his gaunt face. Knox had thought that the treatments had drained all the joy from his son. Then he saw the girl. She edged into the room next to Ben, her head tilted slightly forward as if she wanted to apologize for something. Her tidy student uniform and smooth features made her seem a child in comparison to Ben, who looked twice his twenty-one years. Her hair was the color of weathered steel. His son put an arm around her and pulled her to him. Horrified, Knox guessed what was about to happen. There was pride in Ben's voice, "Dad, meet Madeline Bianchi. We want to get married."

— Martin Carr puffed his cigar and watched benignly as Knox finished his steak. The cigar smell soured the meat and he stopped eating. He was not expecting to be made a partner in the firm. Carr spoke the words solemnly, but there was nothing solemn about Knox's reaction. He had felt like a balloon stretched to bursting. They shook on it and all his nervous energy surged to his hand. Carr grimaced, broke his grip and they both laughed. I'm finally going someplace, Knox thought. I'm on my way.

The longer the experiment continued, the more he looked forward to his experiences in the chair. He had some physical discomfort; the remembering sometimes left him drained and helpless. Often his stump would throb or his lost foot would itch maddeningly. But these annoyances he accepted.

He came to savor all his memories equally, even the unpleasant ones, since he found in remembered sorrow a moment of true and exquisite feeling such as he had never before experienced.

The experiment consumed all other interests. The drafting board was put away and forgotten. Knox spent most of his spare time in the library, jogging his memory with histories and old newspapers, or in bed, concentrating fiercely on the past in the hope that he might trigger the memory response. The energy level of the stimulator came steadily down; soon only the slightest flash sent him spinning into the past. He was reborn with purpose; he convinced himself that by cracking that last barrier he could restore his flagging sense of self-worth.

Even the half shift in the maintenance unit became more bearable. Although Madeline con-

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tinued to harass him, her scoldings no longer mattered. He accepted his life in the Towers and ignored it.

Yet, for all the pleasure that remembering brought him, he was uneasy. For the first time in his life, Knox was unsure of just who he was or should be. Certainly the person who relived those memories was very different from the driven and continent person who had created them. The rememberer passed over the things that the younger Knox had valued and revelled instead in colors and textures, unguarded emotions, whims and fancies. The rememberer had escaped from the lockstep that led from the ambitious young architect to the embittered old janitor.

The monotone of the vacuum cleaner reminded Knox of Somato's *Requiem for a Planet.* He pulled a chrome and plastic chair away from the conference table and whisked the brush underneath with four expert strokes. The intense little composer had been Ben's music teacher up until the time they had been evacuated to the Towers. Knox had disliked Somato; the man's doomed pessimism was tiresome.

Knox reached the cord's limit. Rather than plug the vacuum into a nearer socket, he made a hasty arcing sweep with the brush and moved back. Somato had gone in one of the waves of mass suicide in '95; Ben had found the obituary in one of the last editions of the *Times.* Knox had always felt a secret, guilty satisfaction at Somato's death. It confirmed his opinion of the man. His tough-mindedness had been all show; in the end he had taken the easiest way out.

He wondered if the library had a recording of the *Requiem.* Hearing it might touch off....

A hand touched his shoulder and sent a shiver of surprise through him. He turned; Madeline was watching him grimly. She motioned for him to shut off the machine. The silence seemed to roar in his ears like the *Requiem's* sonorous opening.

"Sit down," she said quietly.

They sat facing each other at the large conference table where the Executive Committee of the Towers met. Knox felt uncomfortable there in his dirty worksuit.

"Morris, there's no way to put this politely, so I'm just going to say it right out. You're giving up the experiment."

He rubbed his fingers on the clear plexiglass of the tabletop. His sweat left smudges which he wiped away with his sleeve. He said nothing.

"I don't know what's the matter with you, that you can't see it

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yourself. We can, all your friends in the unit. Your mind isn't on the work. What you do is sloppy — useless." Her eyes caught and held his; her stare was an accusation. It wounded him because he knew that from her point of view it was justified. "Come on, Morris. If you admit it, I can help you." Her face had softened. He had seen that look before. He had seen it on the day she had been promoted to his job. She had told him herself and that was the way her face had looked, as if she were apologizing for the way life had treated him. She was the last of my friends, he told himself wistfully.

"Look at you! You're not even listening."

"What? No, I am, I am. But I can't quit now. I haven't accomplished anything yet."

"You've accomplished one thing. You've become old before your time."

"You have no right to say that. Of all the people in the Towers, you expecially have no right, damn you."

Her face reddened, but she remained calm. "I only want to help," she said patiently. "You're too old to do two jobs. Stay with me. I can make sure that you're taken care of in the dorm. Cheddi Jain doesn't care about you. He'll use you up and throw you away."

"But what I'm doing is important. I've missed so much and now ... I'm old, yes. That's why. I'm going to use the time I have left for something more important than cleaning toilets."

She swiveled her chair slowly away from him. She seemed to speak into her lap but he heard her clearly. The coldness in her voice bit into him. "Then kill yourself, for all I care. Only you're not going to do it in my unit. Put your equipment away and get out. You're finished."

She stood up and walked quickly away from him. She did not look back.

Knox shambled down the corridors of Tower II aimlessly. He did not want to go back to his cubicle, not for a while. The halls were full of people. There was a purposefulness about them as they passed him briskly, studying sheaves of plastic, checking the wall clocks, discussing their work. But where are they going, he wondered. Do they really know? He wanted to ask someone but was afraid of what they might say.

Knox slowed to a stop and just watched. He realized that there was not a single person in the world who cared where he was going or when he would arrive. Even he did not care.

He shivered and touched off the memory response.

He was seven years old, at the

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beach with his grandparents. He was charging over the hot, ivory sand. His feet burned. The water hissed along the shore, leaving a necklace of foam at its farthest reach. He got to the edge and stopped abruptly. The sand here was the color of grandpa's skin and cool.

"Can you hear me?"

"What's the matter?"

"He works for Bianchi, I think."

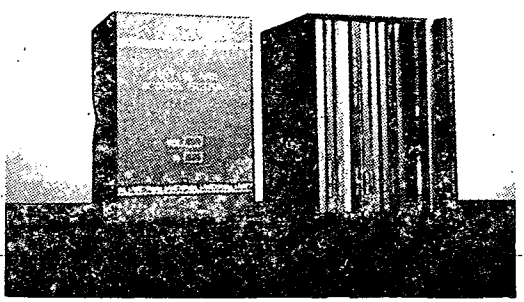
The voices mingled with the sea's murmur and were carried away on a breeze made of salt. He watched the clouds slide quietly across the sky.

"Morris, it's me. Oh my God! Get him out of here. And call Jain, damn it!"

A wave washed over his feet and receded, sucking sand from between his toes. It tickled. He wondered why anyone would want to be anywhere but at this beach on this summer day.

He returned to the Towers much later to find himself staring at a green wall spattered with pale brown stains. He rolled over and saw that he was in a large room. He could not place it at first, but then realized that he had finally arrived at the geriatrics dormitory.

Morris Knox laughed out loud for the first time in years. He did not plan on staying.



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This tale, concerning an ill-humored potter and work of his that was too *flawless, will be included in Jane Yolen's soon to be published collection,* Dream Weaver.

The Pot Child

by JANE YOLEN

There was once an ill-humored potter who lived all alone and made his way by shaping clay into cups and bowls and urns. His pots were colored with the tones of the earth, and on their sides he painted all creatures, excepting man.

"For there was never a human I liked well enough," said the bitter old man.

But one day, when the potter was known throughout the land for his sharp tongue as well as his pots, and so old that even death might have come as a friend, he sat down, and on the side of a large bisqued urn he drew a child.

The child was without flaw in the outline, and so the potter colored in its form with earth glazes: rutile for the body and cobalt blue for the eyes. And to the potter's practiced eye, the figure on the pot was perfect.

So he put the pot into the kiln, closed up the door with bricks, and set the flame.

Slowly the fires burned. And within the kiln the glazes matured and turned their proper tones.

It was a full day and a night before the firing was done. And a full day and a night before the kiln had cooled. And it was a full day and a night before the old potter dared unbrick the kiln door. For the pot child was his masterpiece, of this he was sure.

At last, though, he could put it off no longer. He took down the kiln door, reached in, and removed the urn.

Slowly he felt along the pot's side, which was smooth and still warm. He sat the pot on the ground and walked around it, nodding his head as he went.

The child on the pot was so lifelike, it seemed to follow him with its lapis eyes. Its skin was a pearly yellow-white and each hair on its head like beaten gold.

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So the old potter squatted down before the urn, examining the figure closely, checking it for cracks and flaws. But there were none. He drew in his breath at the child's beauty and thought to himself, "There is one I *might* like well enough." And when he expelled his breath again, he blew directly on the image's lips.

At that, the pot child sighed and stepped off the urn.

Well, this so startled the old man, that he fell back into the dust.

After a while, though, the potter saw that the pot child was waiting for him to speak. So he stood up and in a brusque tone said, "Well, then, come here. Let me look at you."

The child ran over to him and, ignoring his tone, put its arms around his waist and whispered "Father" in a high sweet voice.

This so startled the old man that he was speechless for the first time in his life. And as he could not find the words to tell the child to go, it stayed. And after a day, when he found the words, the potter knew he could not utter them, for the child's perfect face and figure enchanted him.

When the potter worked or ate or slept, the child was by his side, speaking when spoken to but otherwise still. It was a pot child, after all, and not a real child. It did not join him but was content to watch. When other people came to the old man's shop, the child stepped back onto the urn and did not move. Only the potter knew it was alive.

One day several famous people came to the potter's shop. He showed them all around, grudgingly, touching one pot and then another. He answered their questions in a voice that was crusty and hard. But they knew his reputation and did not answer back.

At last they came to the urn.

The old man stood before it and sighed. It was such an uncharacteristic sound that the people looked at him strangely. But the potter did not notice. He simply stood for a moment more, then said, "This is the Pot Child. It is my masterpiece. I shall never make another one so fine."

He moved away and one woman said after him, "It *is* good." But turning to her companions, she added in a low voice, "But it is too perfect for me."

A man with her agreed. "It lacks something," he whispered back.

The woman thought a moment. "It has no heart," she said. "That is what is wrong."

"It has no soul," he amended.

They nodded at each other and turned away from the urn. The woman picked out several small

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bowls and, paying for them, they went away.

No sooner were the people out of sight than the pot child stepped down from the urn.

"Father," the pot child asked, "What is a heart?"

"A vastly overrated part of the body," said the old man gruffly. He turned to work the clay on his wheel.

"Then," thought the pot child, "I am better off without one." It watched as the clay grew first tall and then wide between the potter's knowing palms. It hesitated asking another question but at last could bear it no longer.

"And what is a soul, Father?" asked the pot child. "Why did you not draw one on me when you made me on the urn?"

The potter looked up in surprise. "Draw one? No one can draw a soul."

The child's disappointment was so profound, the potter added. "A man's body is like a pot, which does not disclose what is inside. Only when the pot is poured, do we see its contents. Only when a man acts, do we know what kind of soul he has."

The pot child seemed happy with that explanation, and the potter went back to his work. But over the next few weeks the child continually got in his way. When the potter worked the clay, the pot child tried to bring him water to keep the clay moist. But the water spilled and the potter pushed the child away.

When the potter carried the unfired pots to the kiln, the pot child tried to carry some, too. But it dropped the pots and many were shattered. The potter started to cry out in anger, bit his tongue, and was still.

When the potter went to fire the kiln, the pot child tried to light the flame. Instead, it blew out the fire.

At last the potter cried, "You heartless thing. Leave me to do my work. It is all I have. How am I to keep body and soul together when I am so plagued by you?"

At these words, the pot child sat down in the dirt, covered its face, and wept. Its tiny body heaved so with its sobs that the potter feared it would break in two. His crusty old heart softened and he went over to the pot child and said, "There, child. I did not mean to shout so. What is it that ails you?"

The pot child looked up. "Oh, my Father, I know I have no heart. But that is a vastly overrated part of the body. Still, I was trying to show how I was growing a soul."

The old man looked startled for a minute, but then recalling their conversation of many weeks before, he said, "My poor pot child. No one can *grow* soul. It is

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there from birth." He touched the child lightly on the head.

The potter had meant to console the child, but at that the child cried even harder than before. Drops sprang from its eyes and ran down its cheeks like blue glaze. "Then I shall never have a soul," the pot child cried. "For I was not born but made."

Seeing how the child suffered, the old man took a deep breath. And when he let it out again he said, "Child, as I made you, now I will make you a promise. When I die, you shall have *my* soul, for then I shall no longer need it."

"Oh, then I will be truly happy," said the pot child, slipping its little hand gratefully into the old man's. It did not see the look of pain that crossed the old man's face. But when it looked up at him and smiled, the old man could not help but smile back.

That very night, under the watchful eyes of the pot child, the potter wrote out his will. It was a simple paper, but it took a long time to compose, for words did not come easily to the old man. Yet, as he wrote, he felt surprisingly lightened. And the pot child smiled at him all the while. At last, after many scratchings out, it was done. The potter read the paper aloud to the pot child.

"It is good," said the pot child. "You do not suppose I will have long to wait for my soul?"

The old man laughed. "Not long, child."

And then the old man slept, tired after the late night's labor. But he had been so busy writing, he had forgotten to bank his fire, and in the darkest part of the night the flames went out.

In the morning the shop was ice-cold and so was the old man. He did not waken and, without him, the pot child could not move from its shelf.

Later in the day, when the first customers arrived, they found the old man. And beneath his cold fingers lay a piece of paper that said:

> When I am dead, place my body in my kiln and light the flames. And when I am nothing but ashes, let those ashes be placed inside the Pot Child. For I would be one, body and soul, with the earth I have worked.

So it was done as the potter wished. And when the kiln was opened up, the people of the town placed the ashes in the ice-cold urn.

At the touch of the hot ashes, the pot cracked: once across the breast of the child and two small fissures under its eyes.

"What a shame," said the people to one another on seeing that.

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"We should have waited until the ashes cooled."

Yet the pot was still so beautiful, and the old potter so well-known, that the urn was placed at once in a museum. Many people came to gaze on it.

One of those was the woman who had seen the pot that day so long ago at the shop.

"Why, look," she said to her companions, "it is the pot the old man called his masterpiece. It *is* good. But I like it even better now with those small cracks."

"Yes," said her companions, "it was too perfect before."

"Now the pot child has real character," said the woman. "It has ... heart."

"Yes," added her companion, "it has soul."

And they said it so loudly that all the people around them heard. The story of their conversation was printed and repeated throughout the land, and everyone who went by the pot stopped and murmured, as if part of a ritual, "Look at that pot child. It has such heart. It has such soul."

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We suppose that countless stories have been built from the drama surrounding the Reading of the Will. Here, Eric Norden ("One Fine Day," September 1977) offers a fresh science-fictional variation on that classic theme.

The Gathering Of The Clan

by ERIC NORDEN

The old man took a long time dying. They'd all expected him to go quickly after the last massive stroke, but he clung on, tenacious as always, clawing desperately at life. He's spiting us still, the relatives all said, but to themselves. Never out loud, not yet. Even to the doctor who'd attended him for three years, since the first mild seizure through two paralyzing attacks, it was something of a miracle that the old man survived, but, unlike the others, he admired him for it; despite the drugs, the pain had to be terrible. When they'd come to him, softly, subtly, urging an end to the old man's suffering, humane and undetectable, he'd just turned his back on them. No words, but the threat was there and they never raised the subject again. They could afford to wait, or so they thought. Sometimes the doctor sensed the old man was waiting too, for some sign, some message, that would let him slip away in peace. Now, as the butler stood over the bed, ten years younger than his master but seventy if a day, something did pass wordlessly between them. The old man could not speak or move, but one eye could still blink and it fluttered now, feebly, desperately, semaphoring a silent plea. The butler just nodded and reached out to touch the withered, liver-spotted hand on the counterpane. The eye closed, and a few moments later the frozen face seemed to melt, although the rattle of air expelled from the collapsing lungs was more snarl than sigh.

The doctor gently drew the butler away from the bed, but he had to pry his fingers from the old man's hand. He went through the formalities, then pulled a silk sheet over the leathery face. As he filled out the death certificate for the medical examiner, the butler stood

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over his shoulder, looking down. When he entered the cause of death as cardiac arrest, the other man shook his head and spoke for the first time.

"It was murder," he said quietly. The doctor looked up and saw that his eyes were dry.

The aggregate worth of the cars parked on the circular driveway of the Delahaye estate in Greenwich could have fed a Bangladesh village, and sumptuously by native standards, for the better part of a decade. There was Donny's gray and white Lamborghini Espada GT, gleaming like a sleek steel shark under the dull December sky; Arnold Gellert's customized Mercedes limousine, as big and black as a hearse; Adelaide's antique but lovingly preserved Silver Ghost Rolls; Gardner's Lincoln Continental with its leather roof and pigskin interior, chauffeurless today; and Connie's low-slung bright-red Jaguar XKE, the wheels and undercarriage mud-splattered but still as graceful and predatory as its namesake. Parked some distance away was a '72 Chevy Impala with Z-prefixed rental plates, as incongruous and vaguely awkward in the company as a cart horse among thoroughbreds. It had been there since before the others arrived, and it was empty.

Sommers had greeted each of the relatives under the white columns of the Grecian portico, deferential as ever, and ushered them into the library for cocktails. They all regarded him with suspicion, but said nothing. There would soon be time enough for that.

Arnold Gellert, the family attorney, was the last to arrive, and when Sommers announced him, his thin tired voice with the faintest memory of an English accent devoid of expression, they all hurried to his side.

"For God's sake, man," Adelaide cried, "what does it say?"

Gellert shrugged off his Melton overcoat and tossed it and his attache case onto a Jacobean sideboard. "I don't know," he said wearily. Arnold Gellert was a short man, no more than five six, totally bald and fat. Not jolly-fat, mean-fat. His small eyes were barely visible behind thick pebble-lensed glasses. "Zeller told me he'd left new instructions with the bank. The bloody thing's being delivered by bonded messenger; it won't be here till eight o'clock tonight."

Gardner groaned, and Connie swore softly under her breath. But Adelaide just frowned thoughtfully.

"I wonder why," she said. "The instructions were so definite, we all be here at four..."

Donny raised his tumbler of

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straight Scotch in a mock toast, the ice rattling against the Baccarat crystal.

"The old bastard's making us sweat, Mother." His laughter was high, harsh. "Can't say I blame him. Or maybe he's planning a resurrection, like an old Vincent Price flick, the shade shows up for the reading of the will with his head under one arm..."

"Do shut up, Donny." Connie's voice was taut, mirroring the strain in her eyes. "Christ, if we've waited all these years, four more hours won't kill us."

"Of course not, cousin mine," Donny drawled. "Just think of it as a family reunion, a few tender moments ensconced in the bosom of our loved ones. Really quite thoughtful of grandfather, when you think of it."

"Don't be so *louche,* darling," Adelaide said, regarding her son with a fondness not untouched by contempt. "If things go well, today should be the last time we're together in this place. Or anywhere else, for that matter."

There were no demurrals. The Delahayes shared only one thing in common, a deep and devouring devotion to the family fortune, until his recent death controlled with ruthless parsimony by Malcolm Fiske Delahaye III. There was not even a marked family resemblance beyond the reddish-blond hair, greying on Gardner and Adelaide, the genetic legacy of some medieval Viking marauder along the Normandy coast. Adelaide Delahaye Taplin, the eldest of Malcolm's two children, was tiny and birdlike, deceptively frail, with faded blue eyes and a thin papercut mouth, her face wind-worn and wrinkled, ropy folds of flesh dangling loosely beneath her chin. She supported herself on a rosewood cane with silver horsehead ferrule to brace the steel pin in her hip, a souvenir of the fall that ended her show-jumping; but she still rode, and her stable was one of the best in the East. She was indifferent to fashion, and her shapeless grey suit could have come from a jumble sale, but the diamonds gleaming on her wrists and arthritically gnarled fingers were real. Only in riding habit did she ever appear elegant, but that was her natural element and her only love, more so than the son she tolerated but despised, far more so than the dusty little stockbroker she had married, with some distance permitted to sire her child, and then ignored for thirty years like a disappointing stud until he passed away quietly, perhaps gratefully, in his sleep. Her younger brother Gardner, though pushing sixty, was her opposite in most ways; tall and beefy, his sandy hair just beginning to thin, always elegantly tailored and

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barbered, his love of the good life only recently reflected in the tracery of fine red veins spidering across his cheeks and nose. Gardner had lived in his father's shadow for fifty years, but after the first stroke had quickly discovered the joys of the flesh, leading rapidly to a discreet divorce from his socialite wife, a succession of nubile young proteges, and an escalating bill at Cartier's. The girls were getting younger now, much younger, but there had as yet been no breath of scandal. His daughter, Constance, was a slim, nervous woman in her late twenties who had already gone through two disastrous marriages, several breakdowns, a ecumenical host of lovers, and at least one rest cure in a Maryland drying-out farm. She'd given up alcohol for amphetamines and barbiturates, without noticeable effect, and had gone on to harder highs. The sleeves on her chic Galanos frock were long, as they always were these days, to hide the track marks. Donny, Adelaide's only son, was a few years older and, despite a muddy complexion and nicotine-stained teeth, far more feminine than his haggard cousin. He wore skin-tight brown velvet slacks, Gucci slip-ons and a floral-patterned shirt in scarlet and vermilion, open halfway to the navel to bare a small fortune in chunky gold medallions. His thick blond hair fell almost to the shoulders, and his slim body moved with the liquid grace of a ballet dancer. His smile came easily, charmingly, but it never reached his eyes. He was not incapable of irony, however, and the anxious tableau in the drawing room seemed to afford him genuine amusement.

"This is one wake I expected to be cheerful," he said, refilling his crystal tumbler with single-malt Scotch from the makeshift bar atop a Pembroke table. "Let's at least send the old man to his maker with a smile. God only knows, we've been praying for it long enough."

"*Jesus.*" Arnold Gellert mopped his forehead with a silk handkerchief. "If only Zeller had given me some idea what was in there, you'd think it was the least he could do, professional courtesy and all that..." His voice trailed off weakly, and he started pacing, his tiny well-shod feet noiseless on the Aubusson carpet.

"For God's sake," Gardner said, "you should know these things, what do we pay you for? He should never have been allowed to make another will in the first place, not in his condition. You should have seen to it, man!"

Gellert's voice was petulant now. "What could I do with that goddamned quack riding herd on

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him twenty-four hours a day, and his crazy butler plotting against us? And I never thought he could communicate anything anyway, not after the last stroke."

"I still don't," Adelaide broke in crisply. "Blinking his eye, indeed! I think the doctor and Sommers cooked that up between them so they could get a bigger slice of the pie. And you should have foreseen that, Arnold."

The fat man just sighed. "I tried with the doctor, Addy, and you know how far we got. And Sommers and the old man have been thick as thieves for years. If I'd fired him with even a chance the old man still had his marbles, we'd have had the damned trustees on our back in a flash. So stop riding me! We'll challenge this thing in the courts if we have to, whatever the two of them say. And we'll win."

"We had better, Arnold." Her voice was icy. "Just remember, you have as much to lose as we do. If not more."

The lawyer turned away abruptly, the anxiety in his eyes tinged with fear. Yes, he had more to lose than any of them. His profession, his reputation, and possibly his freedom. It was something he had lived with since the second will was discovered, the raw terror gnawing at his gut night and day.

"I can see this is going to be a fun party," Donny smirked.

"*Five* scorpions in a bottle."

"For Christ's sake, drop it." Arnold Gellert was slumped in a Chippendale chair beneath a murky oil of some ancient, glowering Delahaye. "We're all in this together, and there's no percentage in squabbling among ourselves. We've got to think of a line of attack, how we can discredit the doctor. He was the witness, and it's his testimony on the old man's faculties that'll make or break us in probate. And there's Sommers, too, the sneaky bastard..."

Connie twisted a plait of her long lank hair nervously.

"I wish you'd all stop this goddamn post-mortem, it doesn't get us anywhere. If we're disinherited, we're disinherited, we'll just have to fight it out in the courts."

"For once I agree with Constance," Donny said. "And, in any case, would it be such a disaster if we all had to struggle along on a measly half million a year? It wouldn't exactly put us on food stamps."

"It might be enough to sustain *your* lifestyle, Donald," Gardner said stiffly, "but it's still chicken-feed. We're talking about close to three hundred million here, money that's ours, that we deserve, that we've been promised. I won't be fobbed off with a pittance or

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squeezed out entirely because the old man lost his marbles at the end."

"Jesus." This time there was a genuine disgust in Donny's voice. "Ten generations of Delahayes blew everything, till the family was left with this bloody house, a paragraph in the Social Register and a safe full of worthless paper. You'd all be paupers today if the old man hadn't parlayed that lousy stake into an empire, by the sweat off his balls, by his guts and imagination. None of you, myself included, ever worked a single day of his crummy life for it, yet you've got the gall to sit around and whine because the goodies might not fall into your lap after all." He shook his head. "Beautiful. You're like a bunch of fucking vultures waiting to pick his bones. No, not even that, vultures are at least loyal to their own. Jackals, jackals sneaking around the carcass of a dead lion, snapping at each other, still scared shitless to even take a bite. *Beautiful.*"

Adelaide's voice was arctic. "That's most touching, Donald. I never knew you loved your grandfather so dearly. You should have delivered the eulogy, there wouldn't have been a dry eye in the house."

Donny drained his glass in one gulp and stood silent for a moment. "Love him?" he said finally. "I hated his guts. And sure, I want the money as much as the rest of you. But I respected him just the same. He was a *man*. The last in the line, maybe, but a man just the same."

Connie's laugh was shrill. "Jesus, I've heard everything now, Donny singing the virile virtues. Is that how you hook your little sailor boys?"

"I have only one rule in my private life," Donny said, squeezing out the words. "I don't sleep with junkies."

Before Connie could reply, Adelaide's voice cracked through the room.

"Enough! Arnold is right, this bickering is a waste of time. We have things to talk about, important things. Let's get on with it."

They discussed the problems posed by the existence of a new will for the next two hours, recriminations periodically bubbling to the surface, until Sommers summoned them for dinner. The cook and kitchen staff had been dismissed a month before, shortly after the funeral, but catering had been arranged. Unlike the rest of them, Sommers was expecting the delay.

The main dining room had been a small ballroom in Victorian days, and its scale dwarfed the five guests at the huge, highly polished refectory table. Two open fieldstone fireplaces crackled at either

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end of the room, but there was still a draught. As Donny seated himself, he glanced at the mounted game trophies that studded the oak-paneled walls and shuddered involuntarily. As a highly strung child they'd terrified him, the frozen death masks of antelope, gazelle, wildebeest, lions, even one elephant with yellowing scimitar tusks, and he still found the sight vaguely disturbing. A gallery of death, souvenirs of the old man's power and ruthlessness.

"I spoke to Sommers," Donny said abruptly. "He told me what was in the new will." Their heads snapped up, their bodies stiffened. "The old man left a big bequest to a taxidermist; he wants his corpse stuffed and mounted." Donny's laugh sounded forced even to him. "On the wall in here; and as long as we all get together for dinner every Sunday, the loot is ours. Should be cozy."

Gardner snorted in disgust, but Connie managed a lazy smile. She'd adjourned to an upstairs bathroom, after a particularly vicious argument with her father, and returned languorous, dreamy. And wearing dark glasses. But Donny's mother wasn't amused.

"Show some respect," Adelaide snapped, as a poker-faced Sommers supervised two waiters from the *Cygne d'Or,* a posh country inn run by a *sous chef* from the old Chambord, in the serving of the *patè de turbot froid aux homards.* "Your grandfather loved to hunt, there's no need for mockery."

Donny grinned edgily and allowed the crisply starched waiter to fill his Waterford goblet with Pouilly Fuissè.

"You're a marvelous hypocrite, Mother." He sipped, gratefully . "You wished him dead for thirty years, and now you observe the proprieties." He raised his goblet in a mock toast. *"Nil nisi bonum,* Grandpa. Rest in peace."

"Shut up," Gellert grunted. "You're about as funny as a crutch."

"Original, Arnold," Donny mocked. "I've always said you've got a ready wit about you. Let's hope it impresses the jury."

Gellert nearly choked on his first spoonful of *Crème tortue blonde Alexandre Dumas,* but Adelaide frowned thoughtfully.

"We should really be thinking about that, you know." She waited until Sommers and the two waiters discreetly retired, then pinged her fork thoughtfully on the Spode china. "If worse comes to worse, and papa did provide any proof, we could all be implicated. It's something to consider."

Her tone was calm, cool, the antithesis of the terror that leaped so readily into Gellert's eyes, and

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Donny, despite himself, smiled in genuine admiration.

"You know, Mother, I was wrong when I said grandfather was the last man in the line. *You* are. You should have been his son."

Adelaide didn't challenge the idea. "I doubt I'd have had a head for business, though. And father wouldn't have taken too kindly to a woman at the helm. Of course, he never took me very seriously, he always disapproved of my riding. His passions were all quite carnivorous, whether he was in the boardroom or on safari. I'm afraid I was a disappointment to him."

Oblivious of the exchange between Adelaide and her son, Arnold Gellert mopped his gleaming forehead with a linen napkin. "There's no way he could have proved anything," he said thickly. "The books are clean, he had no evidence. And who'd listen to a crazy, dying old man anyway? One who couldn't even talk, for Chrissake, except through some crazy Morse code with his butler."

"For your sake," Donny said maliciously, "let's hope the district attorney won't."

Gellert flung the napkin to the table. "Remember your mother's words, Donald. You were all in on it, I just did the shitwork." It was true enough, Donny reflected. The money siphoned off from the huge interlocking directorate of Delahaye interests after the old man's first stroke had been evenly divided among the five of them. But Gellert, holding the vital power of attorney during his employer's incapacitation, was the only one with his hands directly in the till, the one who might have left dirty fingerprints. If the old man had found out, sent Sommers to hire investigators during his inexplicable absence from the house, somehow attested his suspicions in the new will he'd managed to smuggle out... . Even Donny, who really didn't care that desperately about the money, knew what that could mean.

Sommers and the two waiters re-entered and adroitly cleared the table. God, Donny thought, watching the old butler's expressionless face, how he must hate us all. His manners were always a perfect blend of deference and dignity, never veering to the extremes of servility or insolence, always proper and composed, always the perfect English manservant. Even at the graveside in the cold late-November rain, he had opened the limousine doors for everyone, held the umbrella over Adelaide's head, even served tea afterwards. But what was he really thinking? Suddenly, irrationally, Donny felt a shiver of fear crawl along his spine, and he drained his goblet of velvety Chambertin. He

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did not, he realized, really want to know.

Dessert was a voluptous Zabaglione, swimming in Marsala, but nobody touched it. After dinner they all adjourned to the library again for brandy, eyes glued to their watches. Shortly before eight, Sommers appeared in the doorway.

"The gentlemen from the *Cygne d'Or* have left," he informed them. "Will you be requiring any more coffee?"

Gardner waved him away irritably and the doors swung shut. Donny walked to the mullion-paned windows and looked out.

"It's snowing harder."

"Shit," Connie hissed, her hands dancing again, the old restlessness back. "What if the roads are closed and the goddamned messenger can't get through?"

"It's only been coming down an hour or so," Donny said absently. "He should make it." Perhaps it was just the drink, but he felt strangely isolated, unreal. He really didn't care what was in the new will anymore, he just wanted to get out, get back to the world and the people he knew and understood. He had, he realized, more in common with the lowest street hustler in the leather bars he frequented than with any of his own family. And, despite the ritualized violence, far less to fear.

The old man could never confront them again, of course, except through the cold contempt chilling Sommers' eyes, but they would never escape his verdict. Nor should we, Donny admitted with the familiar bitterness. God knows, there was enough to answer for: Gellert's embezzlement and their complicity, Connie's addiction and grubbily self-destructive lifestyle, Gardner's weakness and whoring, Adelaide's invincible selfishness, his own homosexuality. Oddly enough, Donny knew, the old man could have forgiven him that alone; he was oddly tolerant of such things for a man of his age and time. It was the indiscretion that had appalled him, the expulsions from school, the blackmail and scandal, the beatings, the one arrest. Family honor was an archaic concept today, even vaguely comic, but it had still meant something to the old man. And they had all betrayed him, on that front as on so many others, until their parasitism and disloyalty and greed had earned them more than the old man's contempt. Over the years, Donny knew, his disappointment had slowly soured into hatred, never more so than at the end, as he watched them loot his empire, mute, paralytic, unable to resist or even protest. And that was what worried Donald, for never before

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in his long life had Gardner Fiske Delahaye allowed his enemies to escape unpunished.

"It's gone eight," Adelaide said, the only one of them not betraying her anxiety. "Not long now."

Gellert started pacing again.

"He'd enjoy this," he muttered, more to himself than the others. "He always liked putting people through the wringer. He was a sadistic bastard, I knew that from the first day I met him. The last of the robber barons, they called him, and they weren't far wrong."

His voice fell off at the sound of a car on the driveway, muffled by snow. After a moment the doorbell rang and they all stood stiffly, not speaking. The time was six minutes past eight.

"This arrived by messenger, madam." Sommers stood in the doorway extending a thick Manila envelope to Adelaide. In the distance, they could hear the car's motor revving up.

"Thank you, Sommers," Adelaide said, calm and collected now that the moment of truth had arrived at last. "We'll call when you are needed."

Sommers nodded and withdrew, but all eyes were fixed on the envelope in Adelaide's hands. She passed it mutely to Gellert, who fumbled open the red wax seal.

"It's witnessed by Sommers and the doctor, just as we suspected." His voice was hoarse, barely audible. "Dated the day Sommers disappeared from the house, that figures too." He hurried over to the Georgian desk in the corner and sat hunched over under the lamp, reading avidly.

"We who are about to die salute thee," Donny said, struggling for the protective cynicism that had deserted him a few moments before. But no one was listening. They all stared at Gellert, even Connie, waiting for the ax to fall.

And then, incredibly, Gellert laughed. Not even a touch of hysteria or fear, but genuine, down-to-earth gut laughter that wracked his fat frame, wobbled his chins, almost dislodged the pebble-lensed glasses from his nose. They all looked at him as if he'd gone mad. Perhaps, Donny thought, he has.

Adelaide, predictably, was the first to overcome her astonishment and react.

"Arnold, what in God's name are you up to? Pull yourself together, man!"

Gellert just waved a pudgy hand as the laughter finally subsided into wheezing sobs.

"Relax," he managed at last. "It's all right." He looked up at them, his eyes fierce with relief.

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"It's all right. The will's the same!"

They all regarded him with astonishment. Adelaide, for once, was speechless.

"The same?" Gardner's voice was strangled. "What are you talking about? It's the new will, how can it —"

"It's the new will, but it's the *same* will!" Gellert lifted the sheaf of papers to his lips and kissed them with a moist, smacking sound. "Oh, the old man changed a few minor bequests, added one or two others, and he upped that damned hobbyhorse of his, Positronics, from two to five million. But the basic provisions are the same, still twenty-five percent of the Delahaye interests to each of you and a hundred thousand to me."

He smiled narrowly at them. "Plus whatever you kick in for past services rendered. And it better be generous."

Adelaide looked numb.

"But how...*why?* Why make a new will at all, then?"

"Don't ask me, he could have just pegged on a codicil for the new bequests and had it witnessed." Gellert shook his head. "He must have been ga-ga to go to this trouble over nothing. But at least it wasn't the way we thought!"

This was too much even for Donny.

"You mean all our shares remain the same? And he left no other instructions?"

"Not a word. Same deal as before, even split. In the event any of us kick off, our share's divided up proportionately among the charities. Positronics will get most of it. I hate to see Sommers grab a hundred and fifty thousand, but we're not gonna challenge anything in this little sweetheart." He patted the will fondly. "No, this is it, and the trustees won't lift a finger. It's what they expected anyway."

Adelaide was frowning into her empty brandy glass.

"Something's wrong, Arnold, it doesn't make sense. There has to be something hidden somewhere...."

Gellert laughed, indulgent now.

"Don't look a gift horse in the mouth, Addy. This will is ironclad, we're home free and dry. But not dry for long. Give me another drink, Connie. We've got some celebrating to do!"

Adelaide shook her head.

"It's not right, Arnold.... The bequests, the new ones, what are they?"

Gellert thumbed absently through the folder. "Nothing big, sixty thousand to some medical research center in Michigan; let's see.... twenty-five thousand to the March of Dimes...." He ran his

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finger across the closely typed page. "Another ten thou to the cook, fair enough. The biggest increase is to Positronics, and even that's small potatoes, it doesn't even make a dent in our slice of the pie." he chuckled. "Addy, I tell you, goddamn it, I feel like a condemned man who's just gotten a reprieve. Not a reprieve, a pardon!" He held up his glass. "Let's drink that toast to the old man after all. He sure gave us hell, but we beat him in the end!"

They all drank, except Adelaide, who perched on the sofa beneath a Morland watercolor, a puzzled frown on her face. Donny felt somehow disappointed, let down. He'd been expecting a dramatic indictment, a punishment for his sins, for all their sins, but his grandfather had let them off. It was anticlimatic, and it was out of character. He sighed and drained his drink. Even the old man had gone soft at the end.

"To Malcolm Fiske Delahaye III," Gellert was babbling on. "Malcolm, we'll think of you as we spend every dollar!" Gellert had never dared call the old man "Malcolm" in his life.

Before the drinks had been refilled, the doors opened and Sommers entered, impeccable and unflappable as ever.

"There is a visitor, madam," he told Adelaide.

"A visitor? In this weather? Who...."

"Dr. Ackerman, madam. Shall I request him to wait?"

"Yes...I mean no." Adelaide looked as flustered as she sounded. "Send him in, Sommers."

"Very good, madam."

"Why should he be here?" Adelaide mused. "We were just talking about him...."

"Must know Positronic's share of the ante has been upped," Gardner suggested. "After all, outside of us, he's the old man's biggest beneficiary, probably wants to make sure we don't squeeze him out of his loot." He snorted. "Damned fool waste of money. For all the millions the old man poured into the institute we've yet to see one dollar in return. Pure research, what crap, it was typical of the way he wasted money. *Our* money...." He frowned briefly, then brightened. "What the hell, it's *all* ours now, let the old crackpot have his five million."

Sommers reappeared, followed closely by a gangling, stooped man in his sixties with sparse white hair and pale, slightly hyperthyroid eyes, dressed in a crumpled blue seersucker suit, incongruous in midwinter, an old-fashioned narrow black knit tie struggling from the collar of his frayed button-down shirt. Nils Ackerman was

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one of the world's leading theoretical physicists and, as director of the Positronics Institute, a man of considerable financial as well as intellectual power, but he always managed to look like an old-age pensioner.

"Speak of the devil," Gellert boomed expansively, his momentary irritation forgotten in the general euphoria. "We were just wondering what you did to earn your shekels." He winked at Adelaide. "Slip the old man some monkey glands at the end, eh, keep him going a little longer?"

"I'm most grateful to Mr. Delahaye," Ackerman said. His voice was soft, with the faintest underlay of an accent. "But that's not why I've come." He shuffled, appearing embarrassed.

"Why *have* you come?" Adelaide asked crisply. "You can be assured we have no intentions of challenging the institute's bequest."

"Yes, yes, of course." Ackerman fidgeted and cast an imploring glance at Sommers, but the old butler remained stone-faced in the doorway behind him. Adelaide, suddenly aware of his continued presence, waved a hand in dismissal.

"You may leave us, Sommers."

"I think not, madam. This concerns us all, myself included."

Adelaide's eyes widened at this unprecedented impertinence, and Donny felt a sudden prickling of excitement. Something *was* going to happen after all, something as dramatic as Sommers' sudden defiance.

"Yes, Mrs. Taplin," Ackerman said, "it is best he remain." His pale eyes darted nervously about the room. "I regret all this, I really do.... But the stakes are so high, the implications so enormous...."

"What *are* you going on about?" Adelaide snapped irritably, momentarily ignoring Sommers' unwanted presence. "If you have a reason to be here, Doctor, I wish you would state it. We have much to discuss tonight."

"Of course, I'm sorry...." He fumbled a battered briar from his pocket and awkwardly tamped it full with tobacco from a plastic pouch. "This is all so difficult.... You see, Mrs. Taplin, we at Positronics have for years been engaged in primarily theoretical research. In nine cases out of ten, there are no direct practical applications of our discoveries, but in a few cases, such as our breakthrough in fusion power, the results have a vital bearing on industry. Your father recognized that and supported us generously over the years even though some on the board were skeptical. I sup-

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pose they considered us a poor investment...."

"And rightly so," Adelaide said coldly. "In any case, Doctor, what does this have to do with us?"

Ackerman puffed at his pipe, an acrid cloud of smoke burgeoning around his head. "Five years ago, Mrs. Taplin, we stumbled upon something of incalculable importance. It was related directly, in fact, to our experiments with advanced applications of fusion power." He paused. "At first, we could not believe what we had found. It seemed to turn every law of physics upside down. But we had to face the reality of what we had accomplished and then understand and master it. The money required was immense, and the need for secrecy vital. If anyone even suspected...." His eyes filmed with a familiar fear. "That has been our recurring nightmare. Our discovery has the potential for unlocking the secrets of the universe. It also could destroy our world."

"This is all most intriguing, Doctor," Adelaide said, with obvious insincerity. "But I really don't see...."

"We went to your father, Mrs. Taplin. He was already ill, it was after the first stroke, but he understood what we had discovered and pledged to support us to the limits of his resources. Over the last four years he has poured thirty million dollars into our work, all from his own private funds. The board, of course, would never have approved a grant of the magnitude required."

"You see, Addy," Gellert exclaimed, slamming his glass on the desk. "I told you he had money we never knew about. And now he's poured it down some goddamned egghead rathole...."

"That hardly concerns us," Adelaide said calmly. "We are well provided for. What interests me is Dr. Ackerman's presence here tonight."

"Yes, well, that's what I...." His words trailed off, and he sucked at his pipe, dragging in the smoke avidly. "It's so difficult, and morally — morally of course it's quite indefensible, but...."

"Doctor," Adelaide sighed, "spit it out. What do you want?"

"What?... Well, nothing, not from you, that is. But the money, you see, the money, we need more, much more. We can control the process to some extent now, but it will take years to really master it, and we can afford no risks. We don't want to inform the government, any government; there are military applications that could prove more disastrous than a thousand H-bombs. Your father was the only man we could trust, the only man who understood...."

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"My father, Doctor, left you five million dollars. Surely you can have no complaints on that score."

"But more is needed, you see, much more. There are years of work ahead, the expenses are immense...."

Adelaide laughed sharply. "If you are asking us to perpetuate my father's folly, Doctor, you will be sorely disappointed. We have no intention of wasting one more penny on your projects." There was a general murmur of assent. Only Donny stayed silent, tense, waiting for the other shoe to drop.

"But, Mrs. Taplin, if you only understood the importance...." Beads of perspiration gleamed on Ackerman's high forehead, and his hand twisted at the pipestem. "Our work is so vital...."

"In that case, Doctor, you will have to wait till we are all dead. The new will, Arnold tells me, provides for our share of the money to go to the institute after our deaths. Considering the ages of Donald and Constance, you should have a good fifty years wait for that blessed day. I doubt if you'll be around yourself to collect."

"Three years." Sommers voice, so unexpected, cut through the room. "Only three years, madam."

"What are you babbling about, Sommers? I have instructed you to leave. Not only this room, but this house. And permanently." She turned to Ackerman. "You will excuse us now, Doctor. There is nothing more to discuss. You may address any future requests for funds in writing, though I promise you will be wasting your time and ours."

Ackerman started to stutter a protest, but Sommers took him gently by the arm. "It does no good," the old butler said softly. "They will know soon enough."

Adelaide strode to the bar and poured herself another brandy. She's drinking more heavily than ever, Donny thought, pleased. She knows something's wrong, just as I do, but she doesn't know what. The new will is wrong, Ackerman is wrong, Sommers is wrong. And beyond, fluttering on the edges of both their consciousness, a larger wrongness, vague and inchoate, but menacing.

"Sommers' insolence has really become insufferable," Adelaide said, sipping her brandy. "He will have to leave tomorrow. As for Ackerman..." She turned and saw the two standing outside the door, still surveying the room, Sommers' eyes bleak, Ackerman's anguished.

"I thought I told...."

"It is time," Sommers said, and suddenly, for the first time anyone could remember, he smiled. His teeth were yellow, crumbling. "There were extensive alter-

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ations to the house since Mr. Delahaye's death. You shall soon appreciate their significance." He turned to Ackerman. "Now."

Ackerman reluctantly extracted a small box from his coat pocket, the size and appearance of a transistor radio.

"I wish," he muttered, "I wish there was some other...."

"*Doctor.*"

Ackerman's hand touched a depression in the box, and with a faint whirring sound gun-metal grey beryllium-steel grates slid smoothly from either side of the door jamb, blocking the doorway as effectively as a prison gate. He pressed the box again, and with the same metallic purr solid steel shutters locked across the entire expanse of the French windows.

Everyone in the library stood stunned for a moment, mute with shock. Adelaide, predictably, was the first to recover her senses.

"My God man, are you mad? Do you think to imprison us in here? The police...."

"Mrs. Taplin," Ackerman said sadly, "I have no wish to harm you. But your father and I concluded a bargain shortly before he died. Sommers was his emissary." The old butler nodded, his eyes bright now, hot. And hungry for what was to come. "He promised me all of the money, everything, nearly three hundred million. It could not be done directly, even in the new will, because his mental condition at the end could have been challenged in probate if he disinherited you outright. So we agreed it would have to go first to all of you, his closest relatives, and only subsequently to me, to the institute. It was our only hope, the answer to our prayers...."

"After our *deaths,*" Adelaide whispered. "You plan to kill us." She looked up, her eyes flaring with the Delahaye fire. "You're fools, both of you. Everyone will know you have the most to gain; there'll be an investigation; you'll die in the electric chair for this...."

"No, no, not to kill you," Ackerman said hastily. "I mean, not really...." He appeared on the verge of tears. "This is so vital, you see, a few lives are nothing compared to it. I would give my own life gladly to continue our work. *Gladly!*"

"Your *work!*" Adelaide spat. "You are mad, mad as my father must have been. Release us from this ridiculous prison immediately, and we may overlook all this. Otherwise, I promise you...."

"Enough talk," Sommers said. "Get rid of them."

Gardner raced to the bars and rattled them, then thrust his hands through toward Sommers, but the old man skipped back, agile for his years.

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"Let us out of here, you bastards!" Gardner shrieked. Connie began to sob uncontrollably, and Gellert just slumped behind the desk in shock, his face slack with incomprehension. Only Donny knew it was real, and only he was unafraid. He wondered how they'd do it? Bullets, some kind of gas, a fire perhaps. Yes, a fire could be passed off as an accident afterwards; they might get away with it. But what about the steel bars and shutters? Would they melt, or remain as proof that they had gone to their deaths penned like cattle? And the workmen who'd installed them, wouldn't they suspect something and go to the authorities? But, still, fire was the most likely way.... Oddly, the thought triggered a sudden surge of sexual excitement. This was it, finally, the real thing. The ultimate atonement....

"We won't kill you," Ackerman cried. "This room, it's not a room any longer, not the way you think. The renovation, you see, the bars are just a part of it, a small part. For weeks we've worked here, wiring the walls, the floor, the ceiling. The entire basement of this house is now a fusion reactor; there's even a direct computer link-up to the institute. You don't know, it cost millions, just for this...."

"Tell them, Doctor," Sommers said, his eyes locked on their faces. "Tell them, and get it over with."

"Our discovery... our work..." Ackerman faltered and ran his hand across his face. "Sommers, is it...."

"*Tell them!*" The servant was gone now, the blank face taut with triumph, the words hard as the steel that sheathed the door and windows.

"Yes, yes, I suppose they should know.... Our discovery involved temporal transfer, the movement of objects in time. We were working with tachyons, which actually do travel faster than the speed of light, theoretically at least; no one actually understands why or how. And then there was a malfunction in the fusion process, and a small generator just...*appeared.* Appeared beside its duplicate, its temporal original, I should say, two days *before* the malfunction. We witnessed it materialize, totally baffled, and two days later we saw it disappear and began to realize the truth. That was the beginning, just the beginning...." His teeth bit hard on the pipestem, making a small crackling sound. "Since then we have learned more about the process, we've even been able to control it. To a degree. First we sent inanimate objects back, then laboratory animals. Never people." The words

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were torn from him. "God help me, never people." he looked directly at Adelaide, as if begging her forgiveness. "You see, the reason we need the money, why it's so urgent.... We haven't mastered the entropy stasis. We can't bring anything *back* yet."

His eyes fell away from Adelaide, but she continued to regard him with cold contempt.

"You are mad as a hatter, Doctor. And if you think we will be your guinea pigs in some insane experiment in... in *time travel,* then you are wrong. You have the power to kill us, but not the power to escape the consequences. And you will never receive a penny of our money."

"You're wrong," Sommers said quietly, triumphantly. "I've seen it, it does work. And the institute will get its money in three years. Three years after your disappearance, when you're all legally declared dead in the State of Connecticut."

"For Christ's sake, Addy," Gardner nearly screamed. "Do something, we've got to get out of here." Abruptly, his eyes fell on the telephone beside the desk, and he grabbed it and began dialing furiously.

"Disconnected," Sommers said pleasantly, even as Gardner held the receiver up to his ear in frustration, then flung it furiously to the floor.

"Listen, please listen," Ackerman pleaded. "I know this is a terrible thing, don't think I haven't wrestled with my conscience over it. But it is the only way, the only way we can perfect the technique without surrendering our discovery. Do you realize what it will mean to science, to the human race, if we can unlock the secrets of time? Not only the past, the future too if space and time are really one vast continuum; there are no limits...." His voice broke, and he almost sobbed. "Don't you think if there was any other way I would have tried...."

"Enough," Sommers said, regarding Ackerman with contempt. "Trigger it."

But Ackerman ignored him, the words tripping over each other, tinged with desperation. "The whole room, you see, it's a transporter chamber now, bigger than anything we've worked with yet, of course, but operating on the same principles. We're able to set the chronology within a few years; there's no limit to the power." He looked at Adelaide, whose face was a mask of defiant anger. "Your father, you see, he didn't want you to die. He wanted you to be sent back to a time when you'd have to survive on your wits alone, 'make it on your own,' those were his exact words, make it on your own with nothing but the clothes

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on your back and your own native intelligence. The mid-18th century, pre-Revolutionary America, those were the temporal coordinates he wanted." He wrung his hands despairingly. "But the paradoxes, he didn't understand the paradoxes, 20th/century men dropped into another age, knowing everything that was to come. You could have disrupted the entire temporal pattern, warped the fabric of time and history, perhaps wiped out our entire present by the consequences of your actions, by your impact on 18th-century society. I had to make certain...alterations." His eyes filmed. "You will not believe me, I know. But I am sorry."

Adelaide laughed harshly.

"Doctor, you are perfectly capable of sticking a gun through those bars and killing us all; there's nothing we can do to stop you. But I have no fears of your transporting us to Colonial New England, or anywhere else for that matter. Now if you will just come to your senses and...."

"Now!" Sommers said, his eyes alight with a fierce joy. Ackerman just looked down at the small console in his hand, but did not move.

"I don't know," he whispered. "I agreed, I know, but I don't think I can...."

Sommers snorted and snatched the box from his trembling hands.

"I swear, Sommers," Adelaide screamed, "if it's the last thing I do I'll see that you rot in jail for this. By God, I'll...."

Sommers' thumb pressed down.

The sensation was rather like falling, combined with a gut-wrenching nausea. It lasted only a few seconds, but it took them all several moments to fully recover. A faint headache seemed to be the only lingering after-effect.

Gardner, his voice still disbelieving, leaned on the desk for support.

"They've done something, by God. I don't know what, but I feel like...."

"Look out the door," Adelaide said, biting back an edge of hysteria. They all stood for a long moment, their eyes fixed on the steel bars and beyond. Only Donny was capable of speech.

"Ackerman was right. Sweet Jesus, Ackerman was right." Beyond the bars of beryllium steel, where the parquet hallway should have led to the front doors, there was nothing but a broad sweep of dun-colored high grass, waving languidly in a warm breeze. The sun was high on the horizon and hot, summer-hot. In the far distance a glint of green, trees or tall ferns, marked the only foliage on the landscape. The rest of the

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house, the driveway, the cars, the meticulously cultivated garden were gone. Gone with the time and the world they had known.

"It's incredible," Adelaide breathed. "Absolutely incredible. It's not winter, it's not Connecticut. Or not *our* Connecticut." She walked slowly to the doorway and clutched the bars, peering out. "The crazy fool has done it. We're back in time."

"And trapped in here," Gardner cried. "Those bars, we'll starve to death...."

With a visible effort of will Adelaide forced herself to contemplate the immediate necessities of their situation. The larger insanity could wait.

"The shutters," she said finally. "We'll use the poker from the fireplace, we can pry them open. The bars are beyond us...."

It took a half-hour, none of them talking, unable to accept the new, mad world they had entered. The heat was oppressive, beating through the walls, damp and fetid, as if there were marshes nearby. When the shutters finally snapped and rattled to the floor, they threw open the French windows to expose whatever breeze stirred. More high grass rolled off to a fringe of towering trees on the horizon, with no sign of cultivation or human presence visible anywhere. Only Adelaide seemed capable of seriously analyzing their predicament.

"I wasn't really listening, I thought he was mad, but Ackerman did say something about the 18th century. If that's true, we could make our way to Hartford, it was settled then, perhaps on to Boston." She looked down at the jewels gleaming on her wrists and fingers, then at the paintings and silverware in the room. "We have assets right here, assets we can convert to gold or currency. Even with what little we know of science and technology, medicine even, we could make our way." Her eyes fixed on the bookcases. "My God, I'd forgotten, our own library! There'll be technical manuals, scientific texts...."

"Mother," Donny said softly, but she didn't reply.

"We can beat the bastards yet," Adelaide said, the words coming quickly now. "With the knowledge stored in this room we could become the masters of this entire society; we could rule the world...."

"Mother!" Donny cried, his voice half laugh, half sob, pointing out the French windows. Over the crest of a sandy hill, where one hundred million years later the little family cemetery would stand, the first dinosaur appeared.

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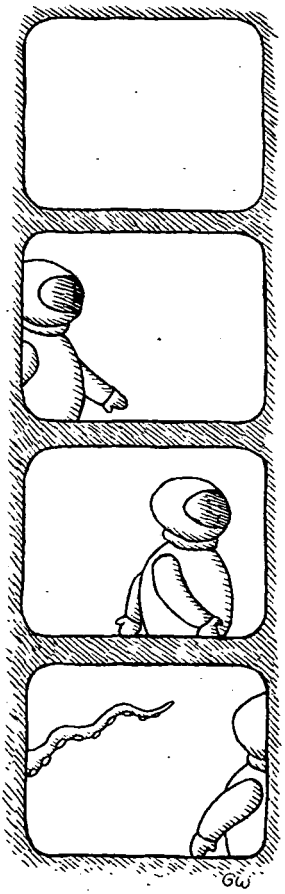
BAIRD SEARLES

Films and Television



DOCTOR WHO'S ON FIRST

A few months back I inquired as to what had become of the horror film. Now another Baroque worry: what ever happened to the fun in science fiction? I don't mean humor particularly (not that that hasn't always been in short supply in the field aside from the most sophomoric booze 'n broads variety).

No, I mean the more general sort of fun, the sort of story that doesn't take itself too seriously. I'm beginning to worry that it may be a vanishing quality, now that s/f is grown up and wears a suit and tie and goes to University. An ominous sign was the inability of much of the science fiction Establishment to cope with *Star Wars.* It seemed to be a sort of "here we've struggled so long to make science fiction respectable and intellectual and we don't need this sort of childishness any more" attitude.

Well, they're going to *hate Doctor Who.*

We Americans have had hints across the Water for many years about the BBC's *Doctor Who.* We've seen at least two movies which were made up of mangled versions of a couple of the mini-series into which the over-all *Doctor Who* series is divided. We had heard how early on in the run the

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the robot Daleks, inhabited by alien intelligences, had inspired every other child in England into behaving like Tik Tok of Oz, badly worrying innumerable parents.

But now we will be able to judge for ourselves; 98 half hours (23 mini-series of 2 to 6 episodes) have been put into syndication here, which means it could be popping up anywhere on your dial at any time. From what I've seen, it is well worth searching out (if, of course, you don't object to fun with science fiction).

These particular episodes, by the way, are not dated left-overs from ten years ago. Some, if not all, reportedly have not yet been seen in England.

First of all, who *is* Doctor Who? Doctor Who "roams through space and time" as an "intergalactic sciéntific adviser," and describes himself as a "time Lord." This would all be very comic book super hero if the good doctor were done up in a skin tight silver leotard with matching cape, helmet and bag. But, typically, he looks like an average art student, with squashy hat, omnipresent scarf, and a touch of Sherlock Holmes. He does not carry arms, and is usually accompanied by a good looking young lady with, for a change, some spunk and intelligence (I was reminded of the Susan St. James roles on *Name of the Game* and *MacMillan and Wife).*

Now here's a stroke of genius and a good indication of the general attitude of the whole thing: Doctor Who's space/time ship is, on the outside, the exact replica of a mild-mannered London call box (phone booth to us), but is larger on the inside than the outside, chock full of handy gadgets, and can go anywhere. Now *that's* funny.

For this review, I saw a ten minute promotional film made up of highlights from the series, and part 1 of the two-part adventure called "The Sontaran Experiment."

There were some goodies in the highlights, including a marvelous mobile Martian mummy, a spectacular blue person of indeterminate sex who absorbed energy, and an enchanting robot dog shaped something like a large toaster, with a limited vocabulary made up for by a vigorously wagging metal tail.

The series seems particularly good on aliens; the examples I saw had imaginative and varied make-ups that were still consistently convincing.

In part 1 of "The Sontaran Experiment" there were some extremely complex and sophisticated concepts set up. The Doctor and friends return to Earth 10,000 years in the future; it is deserted, most of the inhabitants having re-

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settled in other parts of the Galaxy just before some unspecified Solar disaster. However, in the previous mini-series, Doctor Who and friends have apparently rediscovered a legendary space station where some part of the population had gone into suspended animation and overslept.

Doctor Who & Co. return to the supposedly deserted Earth to fix the transmat system there, which is out of whack after all this time (the young lady arrives upsidedown in a patch of heather). But-aha!-the planet is not uninhabited; not only is there a stranded crew of Colonials ("I can tell by your accent," says Doctor Who), but an advance guard of one of the evil Sontarans (who look like anthropoid toads without the toads' friendly expression) and who has a death dealing robot with him.

What a stew! The colonials don't trust the doctor ("Don't give us any of that Mother Earth rubbish"), the robot is chasing everybody all over the landscape, and the Sontaran has captured Sarah ("Ah. The female of the species.").

Continued next week.

I could have seen part 2, but frankly wanted to wait until it came on my own set, where I could put my feet up, sip my Saturday afternoon martini, and have a good at-home giggle.

From these examples, I have high hopes for the series. It is indeed made for children, but it makes such lame American-made series such as *Lost in Space* look twice as idiotic as they did already. There is also the fact, as I noted last month, that the English have had a perpetual genius for creating fiction "for children" that operates on other levels that are hugely enjoyable for adults.

If *Doctor Who* does indeed fulfill this promise, it could indeed, in its own way, be as much fun as *Star Wars,* give us something good humored to look forward to weekly (to fill the void left by the late lamented *Quark),* and put some fun back into science fiction.

Will the colonials accept Doctor Who? Will Sarah escape the toad-faced Sontaran? Will the Doctor find his sonic screwdriver which he lost while repairing the transmat?

Tune in next week (or whenever) and find out for yourself.

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Andrew Weiner ("The Deed," May 1978) returns with an inventive story about a contemporary comedian who travels in time in order to undergo analysis by Sigmund Freud and finds that something has gone oddly askew in the career of Herr Doctor.

Comedians

by ANDREW WEINER

It was a slow, dull sort of night. Drizzly and suprisingly cool for the time of year out on the street. A small and rather sullen audience in the club.

"Jersey City," said the comedian. "I was in Jersey City before, but it was closed. Things were so quiet, the cabbie asked me where *he* could get laid."

Murmurs, snickers, the kiss of death. "What do you want?" the comedian asked. "You want me to make you happy? But what's happy? I'll tell you what's happy. Happy is when you stop beating your head against the wall."

They weren't going with him, not in the least. They just weren't ready for him. That was his problem. He pulled on his cigar. There was a nasty itching at the back of his throat which he had already diagnosed as cancer. *Ziggy the doctor,* he thought.

"I went to the doctor," he said. "I said, doctor, doctor, I got this terrible problem. I can't stop passing gas."

Slight inhalation of shock from a lady in the front row.

"I can't stop *farting,,* " said the comedian, with some relish. "All day and all night, I fart. So the doctor said, wait right there. He went into the next room, came back with a long pole with a hook on the end of it. I started to back away. I said, what are you going to do with *that?* He said, well for starters I'm going to open the window...."

A few choked laughs.

"What do you want? You want to hear *mother-in-laws?* I'll give you mother-in-laws. One cannibal says to the other, I hate my mother-in-law. So the other one says, just eat the crust.

"My wife, she got sick. The doctor came around, he said, I don't like the look of her. Doctor,

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I said, that makes two of us.

"What's the matter with you people? You're not drunk yet, that's what the matter with you people is. One drunk meets another outside the public baths. He says, did you take a bath? The other one says, why, is there one missing?

"All right, so I'm no Jack Benny. Let me tell you, I'm *meaner* than Jack Benny. I'm so mean, I jimmy the lock at the public can. Then I steal the toilet paper.... Toilet paper, you should see how my wife goes through the toilet paper, she thinks I'm John D. Rockefeller. You, lady, yes, you there. I want to know how many pieces you use. We're just talking number-ones here. I bet you must be good for, oh, twenty-five pieces at least. Am I right, lady?"

What a place, he thought, what a pigsty. Me, Ziggy F., in a dump like this. What is the world coming to?

"Did I ever tell you how I met my wife? My cousin Arny says, I'm going to fix you up with this great dame. So he brings her around and I take a look. Then I take Arny to one side and I say, whispering-like, what kind of a dame is this? She's old, she's ugly as sin, she squints, she's got lousy teeth. It's all right, Arny says, you don't have to whisper. She's deaf too.

"Well, Arny told me that her father was no longer living. After we're married, I find out her father is doing ten to twenty-five in San Quentin. So I said to Arny, you told me her father was no longer living. And he said, you call that living?"

The year was 1928. Outside, the drizzle was turning into rain.

II

I made it, Murray Fogel thought, triumphant, as he stood at the door of the rather unprepossessing house at 19 Berggasse. I really made it.

He pulled once again at the genuine antique-type bell.

Shuffling noises came from behind the door, then an opening of bolts. Finally the door opened a few inches. A tiny, white-haired lady peeked around the crack.

"I would like," Murray said, in his stumbling, uncertain German, "to speak to the doctor."

"The doctor?" echoed the old lady. "No doctor lives here."

"This is 19 Berggasse?"

"Where else?" The old lady was now staring, with frank curiousity, at Murray's brightly checked red sports jacket.

I must look, he realized suddenly, like a sore thumb in this outfit.

"Is this not the residence of Herr Doctor Freud?"

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"Freud?" echoed the old lady, again. "There is no Freud here."

The door, abruptly, closed in his face.

Another screw-up, Murray thought. Somehow I always screw up. But this is the right address. Unless there are two Berggasses. Or unless, he thought bleakly, this is the right place but the wrong time.

He bought a newspaper from the vendor at the corner, looked immediately for the date. 29th August, 1928. He was in 1928, all right. So where was Sigmund Freud?

III

"Jesus comes back from heaven, and everyone makes a big fuss over him. They give him the keys to New York, everything he wants. But what he really wants is to cure some lepers.

"So," said Ziggy Freed, "they ship in all these lepers at enormous expense, enough to fill Central Park. You know how you catch leprosy, by the way? It comes from not putting enough toilet paper on the seat. Anyway, here's Jesus and a whole park full of lepers...."

It was getting late, almost late enough to be finished in this terrible dive. And already late enough for the audience, what was left of them, to be reeling their way towards bootlegged drunkenness.

"Say something dirty," a drunk yelled.

"You want to hear dirty?" Ziggy pondered. "What do you mean, you mean like *constipation?* Is that what you mean? My mother-in-law, she constipates easy, seizes up for days at the drop of a hat. Anything can do it to her, anything at all. Tea, coffee, greasy food, sardines...especially sardines...."

And afterwards, in his hotel room, some very bad cocaine. Very, very bad, hardly enough to lift him sufficiently to call his wife.

Woe to you my princess, he had written her once, during their interminable courtship, *I will kiss you quite red and feed you until you are plump. And if you are forward, you shall see who is stronger, a gentle little girl who doesn't eat enough or a big wild man who has cocaine in his body.*

In those days he had felt so strong, so alive. There was nothing he could not imagine doing, the great doctor Freud. But in those days the cocaine had been so much purer.

"Martha?" he shouted. It was a very bad connection. "Martha how are you? And the kids?"

He wanted very much to be back in the comfort of their apartment in Brooklyn Heights, away from these peasants in the wilds of New Jersey.

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"No," he told her. "No sign of the breakfast food people. I think there will be no sign at all. They're scared, that's the truth of it. Scared to let me loose on their precious radio show."

He cursed Goldman, his useless agent, for forcing him into this useless trip. He cursed, silently, the peddlers of that unspeakably bad cocaine. And then he retired to his narrow, uncomfortable bed and his equally unspeakable dreams.

IV

In the central library of Vienna, Murray Fogel slowly and tortuously pieced together the story of the rise and sudden fall of Sigmund Freud.

The young physician had graduated from the university in 1881. That much was a matter of record: he had, at least, existed up to that date. For the rest, Fogel had to look through the yellowed newspapers of 1885 and 1886.

It was a short but terrible story: of the young doctor Freud, then just 28, hardly more than a kid, hustling for the fast bucks and fast recognition that would allow him to marry. Seizing on the apparently miraculous properties of the drug cocaine, raving like some kind of madman about the "gorgeous excitement" it produced, singing "a song of praise to this magical substance." Like some kind of snake-oil salesman, the young Freud had boosted up cocaine as a sure-fire cure for depression, a nonhabit-forming cure for morphine addiction.

Freud had gambled his whole career on the drug. And h had lot his bet. By 1896, horror stories were pouring in from all over Germany about innocents becoming addicted to cocaine, on the advise of the "Mad Jew of Vienna." Worse, even, Freud had got hooked on the stuff himself, could not seem to break the habit. And there the story ended, with the young doctor totally discredited, his career in ruins, barred forever from the practise of medicine, taking ship with his young wife to the United States....

But that never happened, Fogel thought. Or at least, not all of it. He recalled, vaguely, hearing mention of Freud's early involvement with cocaine. But surely he had emerged from that episode rellatively unscathed. Surely he beat his own habit as soon as he recognized it.

An alternate time stream, he realized suddenly. That loser Mintz somehow managed to shoot me back into some goddamn alternate universe. Where Sigmund Freud hardly even got started.

My luck, he thought. My freaking luck.

***

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V

"Jokes?" said the comedian. "You want to hear *jokes?* I'll give you *jokes.*"

He was in a bad mood tonight, a terrible mood. The kind of mood to give them a show they would never forget.

"Here's a good one. What lies on the bottom of the ocean and shakes? A nervous wreck, that's what. You like that? You think that's funny?

"Maybe I should sing a song. This song is really going to haunt you. After I get through murdering it.

"That's funny? I'll tell you what's funny, lady. Assholes are funny. Now they're *really* funny. I mean, did you ever stop and think about your asshole? Let me tell you, it's a pretty funny-looking thing...."

Sitting at a table towards the back of the room were an adman and his clients. They had come to this club to audition the notorious Ziggy Freed for his first radio show. If Freed knew that they were in the audience, he did not act as though he cared. The adman could sense that his clients were not impressed with the foul-mouthed Freed.

The adman's name was John B. Watson. At one time, this Watson had been a rather famous psychologist, until a certain scandal had forced him to resign his position in academia.

Give me a dozen infants, Watson had once told the world, *well-formed, and my own specified way to bring them up and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select — doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief....*

Or nightclub comedian? Watson wondered now. Exactly how would you condition a nightclub comedian? Especially a dirty-minded one like this?

"He should clean up his act," one of the clients said. "He could be a very funny guy."

"Humor," Watson said, "is essentially a conditioned response. Particularly dirty humor. What's funnier, after all, than poopoo?"

Oh, yes, it had been great fun being a famous psychologist. But life played strange tricks on you sometimes, and it was fun being an adman too. The pay was a lot better, in any case.

VI

With time to kill, lots of it, before he would be whisked back by Mintz's machine into the familiar world of 1978, if in fact the machine would succeed in whisking him back at all, Fogel brooded.

With his ample supply of 1928 Austrian currency, purchased at ridiculous cost from a rare currency dealer back in Los Angeles, he

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had rented a small room close to the railway station, where he waited out the time.

There was very little to amuse Murray Fogel in the world of Vienna of 1928. Mostly he amused himself by thinking what he would do to his no-good brother-in-law Mintz on his return.

Although ultimately, he realized, he had only himself to blame. What was he doing here? He, the great Murray Fogel, so often acclaimed as the new Milton Berle. Forty years old and amicably divorced, a hit with the girlies. A beautiful house, four wonderful kids, a regular gig at Grossingers, all the TV work he could want... what was he doing, chasing shadows back in time?

Because it wasn't enough, he reminded himself. My life was not enough, something was missing, always missing. And no analyst could fix me up. No analyst except maybe the biggest of them all....

That was why he had bankrolled Mintz in his crackpot scheme, kept him in valves and diodes and whatever else a full three years while he puttered away in that garage of his. My brother-in-law, the inventor, he thought. I should have known he would screw up. Although, when you got right down to it, it was incredible that the thing had worked even this well.

Alternate universes, who could have expected that? But maybe it was fate. Maybe he was fated never to connect with Sigmund Freud. Maybe that would screw up the flow of time, or something like that, like on *Star Trek*; he had seen a show like that once on *Star Trek,* or maybe it was the *Starlost*... whatever.

Or maybe, he thought suddenly, that little pisser Mintz did this to me deliberately. Cooked this up with Helen while my back was turned. Stranded me in this godforsaken place forever. But he doubted that his brother-in-law would have had the guts. A freak accident, that was what this had to be.

At exactly 1:00 p.m. every day, Fogel walked down to the railway station to pick up yesterday's Paris edition of the *International Herald-Trib.* He would then take it back to his room and sit down and read through every single word of it. He was particularly immersed in the doings of Grover Cleveland. That was some President, Murray thought.

Later that afternoon, as Murray turned to page eleven, a somehow familiar-looking photograph caught his eye. He scanned the headline: ***Nightclub comic in obscenity raid: Police lay narcotics charges against Ziggy Freed.***

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VII

"You schlep," Freed screamed into his phone, "You left me rotting in a Jersey jail for two days before you bail me out, and now you want me to play Connecticut. Connecticut! Piss on Connecticut, that's what I say."

His wife, Martha, tugged at his sleeve, urged him to be calm. But he would not be calmed. He continued to berate his unfortunate agent.

"What do you mean, lawyer's fees? I'll pay them, don't you worry about that. Ziggy Freed never owed a cent in his life, which is more than could be said for Izzy Goldman. It's a frame, anyway, the whole thing was a frame, a completely illegal search. They're all antisemites out there, all of them, and it's all your fault. I never wanted to go there in the first place. Breakfast cereal! Who needs breakfast cereal? Prunes, that's all you need, prunes will do it to you every time."

He slammed down the phone.

"Connecticut," he said. "Connecticut."

The doorbell rang. Freed opened it himself. He saw a strange-looking person in a bright red checked jacket standing in his doorway.

"Doctor Freud?" the man asked.

"Doctor?" Freed laughed grotesquely. "The man thinks I'm a doctor. Sure I'm a doctor, I doctor my tax returns, I doctor my feet. That's right, I operate illegally on my corns, but don't tell the AMA."

"I'm sorry," said the strange-looking man. "I meant, of course, *Mister* Freud."

"Freed," corrected the comedian, automatically. "Was Freud, now Freed. Was doctor, now patient." He laughed, again grotesquely.

"Could I come in for a moment?" Fogel inquired. "It's very important."

Something in the man's tone impelled Freed to stand aside and let him in.

VIII

"My name is Murray Fogel," he said. "I'm a comedian."

"You too? You want to swap some jokes? I never even heard of you. Your agent must be worse even than mine."

"My agent," said Murray Fogel, "is still in school. Grade school, in point of fact. Let me explain...."

Freed listened intently. By the time Fogel had concluded, he was grinning broadly.

"It's a good gag," he said, approvingly, "although maybe a little erudite, if you see what I mean. Maybe the *New Yorker*

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would go for it. Ziggy Freed, the dirty comedian, founder of...what did you call it, psycheanalysis?"

"Psychoanalysis," said Fogel. "And I'm not joking. This is no joke. Wait a minute."

He got out his wallet, rummaged through it, finally emerged with a scrap of cardboard. He passed it to Freed.

"What's this?" Freed asked.

"A driver's license from the state of California."

"So?" asked Freed. "So you come from California. You eat avocados all day. And you can drive. Big deal. I walk, it's better for the bowels."

"Look at the date," Fogel said.

"1977," Freed read. "All right, so this piece of cardboard says 1977. And from this I should conclude that I'm in the wrong occupation?"

"You have to believe it," Fogel said. "You have to."

IX

"When I was four," said Murray Fogel, "my little sister Andrea was born. I still remember it vividly. She was born at home, and afterwards they took me up to look at her. I remember that, I remember the blood...."

Freed stifled a yawn, then remembered that Fogel could not see him where he was sitting, where Fogel had insisted that he must sit, behind the couch. He yawned wholeheartedly, though silently.

Why did Fogel always insist on stretching out on the couch during these sessions? Granted, it was a very nice couch. He remembered picking it out with his wife at Macy's, after a string of particularly well-paying dates, in a period where he was keeping it all as clean as possible. But the material was a bit faded now, and the springs were going.

He noticed that Fogel seemed to have dried up.

"The blood," he prompted. "What did that make you think of?"

"They took her widdler away," Fogel said, almost sobbed. "She didn't have a widdler. My daddy bit it off, like he always said he would do to me...."

Oh my God, Freed thought.

He looked at his watch. Another twenty minutes of this and he would be through for the day. He was not sure he could stand it for even that long. There was something a bit disturbing about sitting here listening to a guy tell you stuff like this.

But on the other hand, if this meshuganah Fogel was going to insist on paying him $20 an hour for this, every day, how could he refuse? Because it certainly beat working. And besides, it *was* sort of interesting, in a way. A lot of it

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had definite comic possibilities. Angles he had never really considered. Cutting off widdlers, for instance, that really took him back. He hadn't heard stuff like that in years.

Let me see now, he extemporized rapidly. A man wakes up in the middle of the night and finds that his widdler has fallen off. So he wakes up his wife and says....

Despite all his best intentions, Freed began to giggle.

"What's the joke?" Fogel asked. "What's the big joke?"

"The joke is this," Freed said. "A man wakes up in the middle of the night and finds that his widdler has gone, it must have fallen off. So he starts rummaging through the bed and wakes up his wife. She says, what's the matter dear? And he says, Sally, Sally, my widdler fell off! And she says...."

"You're laughing at me," Fogel said. "That's what you're doing. Sitting there laughing at me."

"I'm not laughing at you," Ziggy Freed said, suddenly serious. "I wouldn't do that. But you got to understand, I'm a comedian. That's what I am. A *comedian.*"

X

Mintz, Mintz, thought Murray Fogel, pacing the floor of his flea-bitten hotel room. Get me out of here, why don't you?

The date of his so-called "automatic return," computed by Mintz as 93 days following his departure, had long since come and gone. So it worked fine on the rats, so what? Mintz probably sent them into the next room, or Borneo or somewhere. I've got to face facts. I'm stuck here. Stuck here forever in this no-good world of 1928, almost 1929. With a Depression coming, too, any time now, unless they missed out on that here as well.

What am I going to do? he wondered. What the hell am I going to do?

His currency was almost at an end now, and his credit cards were good for precisely nothing. He had squandered plenty on that nauseating dirigible flight over here to track down that no-goodnik Freud, or Freed, or whatever he called himself. And then he had blown the rest lying on Freed's bumpy couch, spewing out his guts, and for what? So that creep could laugh at him, turn him into material for his smutty jokes.

He really thinks he's something, Fogel reflected. The great comedian. He thinks he's so far ahead of his time. He thinks he practically *invented* peepee and kaka jokes. The poor schlep.

Sublimation, that was what it was, no doubt of that. Genius thwarted and rechanneled into gar-

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bage. Although he *was* funny, Fogel had to give him that, having caught his act a few times out of morbid curiosity. He *was* ahead of his time. Lenny Bruce hardly even born yet, and here's Ziggy Freed shooting off his mouth about assholes. It would never play at Grossingers, but what the hell? The man was born with a need to shock the world one way or another.

And comedy was certainly a noble enough occupation. He would be the last to deny that. The world needed a good laugh now and again. But it wasn't enough, not for him, Murray Fogel, It just wasn't enough.

I'm not going to start all that again, he decided. Sure I could do it all over again, but I just couldn't bear it. At forty years old, I'm going to start all that again?

A new life. That was what this would have to be for him, a completely new life. Getting set adrift in this alternate time stream or whatever it was, that could turn out to be the best thing that ever happened to him. Because this time his life was really going to count for something.

The first thing he would need would be money. But money would be no problem at all. He could step right down to Wall Street and practically print the stuff, put together a nice little bankroll. Then he could really get to it.

He examined himself critically in the shaving mirror. Not bad, he thought. A little paunchy maybe. Lose some weight and I could pass for thirty. Young enough for med school, with a few well-placed bribes....

XI

"Success," said the successful

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and famous radio comedian Ziggy Freed, "what good is success when you're still burning up inside?"

It's all comedy, thought the famous Doctor Fogel, sitting in the big overstuffed chair behind the comfortable leather couch, staring vaguely at his collection of native Indian artifacts. What a comedy it is. The human comedy.

"I never thought I would tell anyone this," said the famous Ziggy Freed, "but when I was three years old I wished that my little sister would die. And then she did...."

This, Doctor Fogel, is what they mean by "transference." Or rather, it's what *I* mean by transference. Given that I invented the concept.

"Are you listening to me?" Freed asked, suddenly. "Are you listening to me back there? I would hate to think that you're not listening. Indifference just drives me crazy."

"I'm listening," said Fogel.

"You know," said Freed, "for a meshuganah, you turned out to be a pretty smart guy. *Civilization and its lack of content.* Who ever would have thought that a meshuganah in a stripy jacket who sat yapping in my very own parlor would turn around and write a book like that? A book-of-the-month club featured selection, too. Who ever would have thought it?"

"I've a got new one out soon," Fogel said. *"How to interpret your dreams.* My agent is talking film rights on this one. But you're trying to change the subject. You were talking about your sister...."

.....

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THE ROAD TO INFINITY

When I sold my first science fiction story just forty years ago*, my father, terribly impressed at finding himself in the same family with an important literary figure, said to me, "You must now behave with great dignity, Isaac."

I burst into laughter when he said it.

For all I knew at that time, my father was right and writers were supposed to develop the facial attitudes of stuffed frogs, but I knew I never would. I was very young at the time** but I had already had occasion to examine my psyche well enough to know that I lacked even a chemical trace of dignity and was not likely ever to develop any.

And I haven't done so, either.

That makes it hard for people to treat me with the proper awe and reverence, so that when my good friend, and official photographer of all things science fictionish, Jay Kay Klein, wished to know how large a black hole would be made by objects of ordinary mass, he put it this way:

"How large would Isaac Asi-

**Not bad for someone who's only a little over thirty.*

***A little over minus ten, obviously.*

ISAAC ASIMOV

Science

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mov be if he were compressed into a black hole?"*

Another good friend of mine, the physicist and long-time s.f. fan, Milton Rothman, offered to answer the question. To answer it, he had to know my mass, and, making an unfortunately correct guess, he handed Jay Kay the answer.

The thought that I might object to being compressed into a black hole deterred neither Jay Kay nor Milt. Neither one would have dared do that to my fellow science fiction writers, L. Sprague de Camp or Robert A. Heinlein, both of whom have natural dignity, nor to Harlan Ellison, who would take them apart if they tried, but no one worries about good old Isaac.

However, I've lost twenty pounds since that classic exchange, so the figures have altered, and I'd like to start all over again. — From the beginning of course.

Any black hole has a "Schwarzschild radius," named for the German astronomer, Karl Schwarzschild, who first determined its value long before black holes had become a routine topic for cocktail party conversations. (Schwarzschild died in 1916.) The Schwarzschild radius is the distance from the center of a black hole to a point on an imaginary sphere surrounding it where the escape velocity is equal to the speed of light.

Nothing can escape from the black hole (a statement I'll modify later in the article) once it has passed closer to the center than the Schwarzschild radius. That, according to the conventional point of view, is the place of no return. We will therefore call it the radius of the black hole and twice the Schwarzschild radius is the diameter of the black hole.

The way you can calculate the diameter of a black hole is to make use of the equation, $D = 4GM/C^2$, where D is the diameter of the black hole, G is the gravitational constant, C is the speed of light, and M is the mass of the black hole.

The gravitational constant and the speed of light have well-known values that are fundamental and that scientists assume to be the same everywhere in space and everywhen in time. Making use of a system of units that will give us an answer in meters (and there's no need to specify the units if you'll trust me), the value of G is 6.670×10^{-11}, while the value of C is 2.998×10^{8}.

*For black holes see *FINAL COLLAPSE (F&SF, June 1977).*

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The value of $4G/C^2$ is therefore equal to 2.97×10^{-27} and the equation for the diameter of a black hole becomes: $D = 2.97 \times 10^{-27}M$.

As it happens, my present mass is 74.8 kilograms. Substituting 74.8 for M in the equation, we find that if I were compressed into a black hole, I would have a diameter of 2.22×10^{-25} meters.

It is very difficult to visualize how small that is. It would take 10,000,000,000 objects the size of myself as a black hole to stretch across the diameter of a single proton.

Working with such small objects is clearly unrealistic. Let's consider astronomical bodies instead and ask what diameter each would have if its mass were compressed into a black hole.

Suppose we start with the Moon, which is several billion trillion times as massive as I am; then the Earth, which is 81 times as massive as the Moon, then Jupiter, which is 318 times as massive as the Earth; then the Sun, which is 1,048 times as massive as Jupiter, then the globular cluster in Hercules; which has a mass of about 1,000,000 times the Sun; then our Galaxy; which is 150,000 times the mass of the Hercules globular cluster; finally our Universe, which is perhaps 100,000,000,000 times as massive as our Galaxy.

The results are as follows:

Object	*Mass (kilograms)*	*Diameter of Black Hole (meters)*
Moon	7.35×10^{22}	2.18×10^{-4}
Earth	5.98×10^{24}	1.78×10^{-2}
Jupiter	1.90×10^{27}	5.64
Sun	1.99×10^{30}	5.91×10^{3}
Globular Cluster	2×10^{36}	6×10^{9}
Galaxy	3×10^{41}	9×10^{14}
Universe	3×10^{52}	9×10^{25}

Exponential numbers are easy to manipulate but not necessarily easy to picture at a glance, so let's look at those black-hole diameters in another way.

To begin with, let's use a convenient terminology. Instead of saying "a black hole with the mass of the Moon," let's just say B-Moon and treat the other objects in the same way. The diameter of the B-Moon is about a fifth of a millimeter, which would make it just about large

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enough to see without a magnifying glass (but it would be an object with the full mass of the Moon, which is the amazing thing about it).

The B-Earth would be 1¾ centimeters across, or about 7/10 of an inch — the size of a marble.

With the B-Jupiter, we are beginning to get somewhere, for it would be 5.64 meters (18.5 feet) across. It would fill a good-sized, two-story-high living room.

The B-Sun would be 5.91 kilometers (3.67 miles) across and would have the volume of a small asteroid.

The B-Cluster would be 6 million kilometers (3.7 million miles across and would have nearly 80 times the volume of the Sun.

The B-Galaxy would be roughly a trillion kilometers across, or about a tenth of a light-year and would be far wider than the orbit of Pluto.

The B-Universe would be ten billion light-years across, a very respectable size indeed.

You'll notice, from the Equation I used, that the diameter of a black hole is proportional to its mass, or, which is the same thing, that the mass is proportional to the diameter.

This is an odd thing and does not fit what we would expect of ordinary objects.

We know from geometry that the volume of a sphere is proportional to the cube of its diameter. In other words, the volume of a sphere that is 2 meters across is 2 x 2 x 2, or 8 times as great as the volume of a sphere that is 1 meter across. (This is also true of cubes or of any object of any shape, as long as it does not change its shape or its proportions as it grows larger and smaller.)

If we imagine a sphere to be made of a substance of certain density and if this density does not change as the sphere is made larger or smaller, then the mass of the sphere is proportional to the volume. If a large sphere has eight times the volume of a small sphere, it also has a mass eight times the mass of a small sphere.

Consequently, provided density is held constant, the mass of a sphere is proportional to the cube of its diameter; or, to put it in reverse, the diameter of a sphere is proportional to the cube root of its mass.

How, then, in a black hole, can it be that the diameter is not proportional to the cube root of its mass — but is proportional to the mass directly.

The answer is that density is *not* held constant in the case of a black

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hole. A large black hole is less dense than a small one; less mass is squeezed into a large black hole than you would expect from its volume, and for that reason a black hole 2 meters across is not 8 times as massive as a black hole 1 meter across, but is only 2 times as massive.

To have this make sense consider what happens as any object is compressed —

The gravitational pull of the Earth on you, when you stand on its surface, is, let us say, 70 kilograms. This pull increases as the distance between you and the center of the Earth decreases, *provided* all the mass of the Earth stays between you and the Earth's center.

If you were to try to approach the Earth's center by burrowing through the Earth's crust and mantle, you would be leaving more and more of the Earth's mass on the other side of yourself. The mass on the other side would counter the Earth's pull, and you would actually experience a smaller gravitational pull as you burrowed. When you reached the Earth's center, you would experience no pull at all and would be at zero-gravity.

If, however, the Earth were compressed into a smaller and smaller sphere, with none of its mass lost (meaning that its density were increasing steadily), and if you remained on its surface while this was happening, you would be approaching the center steadily, with all the mass of the Earth remaining between you and the center. The gravitational pull on you would therefore increase and carry you forward on the road to infinity, for once the Earth had been compressed to zero volume, and infinite density, and you were at the infinitely-dense center, the gravitational pull on you would be infinite, too.

Somewhere in the course of that compression, the surface gravity would reach the stage where the escape velocity would equal the speed of light, and that would mark the Schwarzschild radius.

This would be true for any body possessing mass, however small that mass might be.

Naturally, the more massive a body, the greater the surface gravity is likely to be to begin with and the less it need be compressed to achieve a surface gravity large enough to produce an escape velocity equal to the speed of light. Since the more massive body need be compressed less, it reaches a lesser density level when it becomes a black hole. Suppose, for instance, we calculate the density of the various black holes we talked about earlier. It would look like this:

* * *

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Black Hole	*Density (kilograms per cubic meter)*
B-Moon	4.2×10^{34}
B-Earth	6.4×10^{30}
B-Jupiter	6.3×10^{25}
B-Sun	5.8×10^{21}
B-Cluster	5.6×10^{7}
B-Galaxy	2.5×10^{-3}
B-Universe	2.5×10^{-3}
	2.5×10^{-25}

We have grown accustomed to think of black holes as being extremely dense, and that is reasonable if we think of black holes that possess masses no greater than individual stars. The density of water is 1,000 kilograms per cubic meter, so that the B-Sun is a billion billion times as dense as water.

Black holes of sub-stellar size are denser still. The B-Moon is ten trillion times denser than the B-Sun, while the density of the B-Asimov would be 1.6×10^{77} kilograms per cubic meter. At *that* density, the entire Universe could be fit into the volume of an ordinary atom.

But what if we consider black holes of super-stellar size? The B-Cluster is only a hundred thousand times as dense as water and the B-Galaxy is far *less* dense than water.

As a matter of fact the B-Galaxy is about 1/500 as dense, on the average, as air is on the Earth's surface. Of course, within the tenth-of-a-light-year span of the B-Galaxy, the density may well not be uniform throughout. I could easily imagine that it grows steadily denser as the center is approached. If that is so, then the regions outside the central regions are all the less dense to make up for it; and, in short, the major part of such a black hole must strike us, in terms of density, as a pretty good vacuum.

This is even more so in the case of the B-Universe, where the diameter is not very much smaller than the diameter of the actual Universe and the average density is not very much greater than what it is in the actual Universe.

Well, then, what if the Universe has a somewhat larger mass than I have estimated. Astronomers, at the moment, think not, but astronomers may be wrong. There is some indication that galaxies might be surrounded by hazes of stars and gas outside their clearly observable limits, and this may add unexpected mass to those galaxies and to the

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Universe as a whole. There may also be more and larger black holes in existence than astronomers count upon, and so on.

Suppose, then, that the mass of the Universe is a hundred times larger than I had estimated earlier in the article. In that case, the B-Universe would have a diameter of 9×10^{27} meters or a trillion light-years, some 40 times the diameter of the Observable Universe. The average density of the B-Universe would, in the enlarged case, be about 2.5×10^{-29} kilograms per cubic meter, which is just about what the average density of the actual Universe may be.

In other words, if the Universe were somewhat more massive than astronomers think it is, then it would *be* a black hole and that would account for a great many things.

For instance, if the Universe had more mass than astronomers now think, it would not expand forever. The overall gravitational pull would gradually bring expansion to a stop, and a very slow contraction would begin and then slowly accelerate.

If the Universe were a black hole, you could see why this would be. None of it could move outward beyond the Schwarzschild radius. That would represent the maximum diameter it could reach by expansion, and when that is reached (or perhaps even before it is) contraction must start.

During the period of expansion we are now undergoing, it is possible that local conditions at the centers of galaxies, at the centers of globular clusters, at the centers of massive stars may produce black holes of considerably less mass and size than that of the B-Universe. These smaller black holes (within the B-Universe) have masses that range from perhaps three times that of the Sun to perhaps ten billion times that of the Sun. All are comparatively small, with diameters ranging from that of a small asteroid to that of a large planetary system. The matter within such black holes is generally packed in at enormous densities and has limited freedom of expansion within the black hole.

During the period of contraction of the Universe, additional small black holes will form and a larger and larger percentage of the matter of the Universe will be pent up in close quarters, unable to break out past the restrictive bondage of their various Schwarzschild radii.

Eventually, though, the contraction will push the black holes together into one large black hole with the mass of the Universe. But that is not a stable situation. The one large B-Universe has its Schwarzschild radius half a trillion light-years away in every direction. It has remained there all through the great cycle of expansion and contraction.

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There would then be enormous room in which to expand, and the "cosmic egg" as soon as it forms (heating up, as it coalesces, to an unimaginably high temperature) promptly bounces outward again in an incalculably vast explosion, and the whole thing starts over again.

The British physicist, Stephen Hawking, has applied quantum mechanics to the relativistic equations used to work out the properties of black holes, and it turns out that the usual notion that nothing at all can ever leave a black hole must be slightly modified.

The energy of a rotating black hole is sometimes converted into a particle/antiparticle pair at the Schwarzschild radius. The two particles of the pair move off in opposite directions. One will move into the black hole, but the other will move away from it and escape. The result is a slow drizzle of mass *out* of the black hole, accompanied by electromagnetic radiation. The effect is that the black hole undergoes a kind of evaporation.

This happens at the surface of the black hole only. The more massive the black hole, the larger it is, and the smaller the percentage of its total volume that is near the surface. A very small black hole has almost all its substance quite close to the surface so that almost all of it is subject to the evaporating effect. A very large black hole has almost all of its substance quite far inside the surface so that very little of it is subject to the evaporating effect.

One way of looking at this is to suppose that black holes have a temperature and are therefore boiling away, so to speak. The smaller they are, the hotter they are and the faster they boil away. In fact, the quantum effects cause black holes to radiate mass at a rate equivalent to what would happen if they were at a temperature of $10^{23}/M$ degrees absolute zero, where M is the mass of the black hole in kilograms.

A B-Jupiter would, therefore, behave as though it were at a temperature of 0.0005° K. It would be only a two-thousandth of a degree above absolute zero and it would take an exceedingly long time to evaporate away. Anything more massive would be still closer to absolute zero and the evaporation would be at such a small rate that it could, in all conscience, be ignored.

This is all the more true since the larger a black hole, the more likely it is to encounter matter it can absorb. The more massive a black hole, then, the more likely it is to grow and become still more massive. The B-Jupiter, for instance, is bound to pick up matter at a rate great enough

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to replace what it loses by evaporation many times over, so that its temperature would drop steaily lower and there would be no question of its disappearance until such time (if ever) as it melts into the cosmic egg. Despite the quantum-effect correction, we can still look at such black holes as permanent, and we can still say that nothing emerges and be only negligibly wrong in saying so.

What about black holes smaller than B-Jupiter? B-Earth is at a temperature of 0.016° K, still within only a sixteenth of a degree of absolute zero, and B-Moon has a temperature of 1.4° K. Even the B-Moon doesn't evaporate much, but if we get black holes that are smaller still —

But wait! Where are all these small black holes going to come from? The only process we know of that will form a black hole is the explosion of a giant star into a supernova, and that will result in a black hole somewhat more massive than our Sun. At the center of giant galaxies, a black hole, originating from one star, may grow, through accretion of matter, or the swallowing of stars whole, or the coalescence with other black holes, to masses of even some billions of times that of our Sun. Eventually, the whole Universe may melt, momentarily, into a cosmic egg. But where in all this can we get *small* black holes?

As far as we know, considering the processes that go on in the Universe today, we can't even get something as small as a B-Sun, let alone B-objects smaller still.

Stephen Hawking, however, suggested an entirely different mechanism for black-hole formation; one that can't take place now.

At the time of the big bang, he supposes, the totally indescribable fury of the explosion would set up local pressures, here and there, that would be greater than any now existing at the center of the most massive and densest objects. Some bits of matter would be pressed together, in consequence, toward zero volume and infinite density, and on that road to infinity, would become black holes. Any quantity of matter, even quite insignificant quantities, might form black holes in this way.

Hawking calls such small black holes "mini-black holes." They would have formed only at the time of the big bang and never since. Any that exist now are as old as the present Universe, and Hawking speculates that there might be as many as 300 of them per cubic light-year.

They would come in all sizes, and some would be so small that their effective temperature would be quite high and their radiation rate quite appreciable. A black hole with the mass of the large asteroid Ceres would have an effective temperature of 8.5° K., and one with the mass of the

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small asteroid, Icarus (which has a mass of merely 5 trillion kilograms) would have an effective temperature of 20,000,000,000° K. By the time we get down to the small B-asteroids, they're evaporating at an appreciable rate. (A B-Asimov would have an effective temperature of a billion trillion degrees.)

These smaller mini-black holes could be evaporating faster than they accrete matter, and in that case they would not last forever. If we neglect the accretion of matter, the lifetime of a black hole is $10^{-19}M^3$ seconds, where M is the mass in kilograms.

If a B-Sun accreted no matter, it would take something like 3×10^{64} years for it to evaporate its mass away — which may not be eternity, but which I'm willing to treat as a practical equivalent, especially since it *will* accrete matter.

On the other hand, a B-Asimov would evaporate so rapidly that it would last only a little over a hundred-trillionth of a second. There would therefore be no use in compressing me into a black hole. I would explode instantly in a micro-small version of the big bang.

Well, then, how small must a mini-black hole be to have a lifetime equal to 15 billion years, which is the length of time (more or less) since the Big Bang? That length of time, the present age of the Universe is 4.73×10^{17} seconds. We must then say that $10^{-19}M^3 = 4.73 \times 10^{17}$ and solve for M.

It comes out to 1.68×10^{12} kilograms, and such a black hole in its natural state would be the equivalent of a spherical asteroid about 1 kilometer in diameter.

In other words, any mini-black hole with a mass less than that of a kilometer-diameter asteroid would not be around now. It would (assuming that it hadn't accreted matter in its lifetime) have vanished in the time that has elapsed since the big bang. The smaller it was when it formed, the longer ago it would have vanished.

Any mini-black hole with a mass more than that of a kilometer-diameter asteroid would still be around now, even if it had accreted no matter. What's more, the lifetime increases rapidly with increasing mass. If the mass were only 10 percent greater than the kilometer-diameter asteroid, the mini-black hole would hang around for another twenty billion years.

And if a mini-black hole has just about the mass of a kilometer-diameter asteroid and has added no mass to itself during its lifetime, it should be coming to the end of its life as a mini-black hole just about now.

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What's more, it's not a quiet end. As a mini-black hole evaporates, its mass decreases. As its mass decreases, its effective temperature and its rate of evaporation increase. In other words, the more a mini-black hole evaporates, the faster it continues to evaporate — and the faster — and the faster — until the last million kilograms goes in ten seconds.

The final explosion (which, for the amount of matter that explodes, is very violent) results in the production of a shower of gamma rays with characteristics that Hawking's calculations pin-point.

It is Hawking's suggestion that astronomers be on the lookout for gamma-ray showers of these specific characteristics. If such showers are detected, it would be very difficult to blame them on anything but the disappearance of a mini-black hole that was formed at the time of the big bang and that just happened to be massive enough to last till right now.

These gamma rays have not yet been detected, as far as I know, but they may be at any time in the future. And if they are, then we will know that at least some small bits of matter can (given enough time) retrace their passage on the road to infinity.

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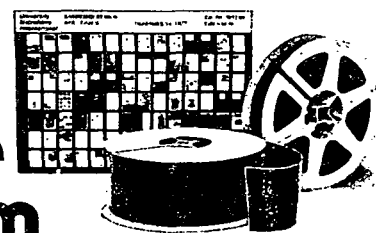

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Suzette Haden Elgin is a Professor of Linguistics at San Diego State and has authored several books on the subject. She has also published a fair amount of science fiction short stories and four novels, the most recent being Star Anchored, Star Angered, *from Doubleday.*

Old Rocking Chair's Got Me

by SUZETTE HADEN ELGIN

The frog's visual system is "tuned in" to only four kinds of stimulation ... They are: light and dark contrast; a moving edge of light or dark; a sudden reduction in illumination; and the constant movement of a small black object. Organisms have only a limited amount of "neurological space" available, and a visual system like the frog's processes just the data important for survival (for example, "There's a bug!").

—Psychology Today: An Introduction, CRM Books, 1972, page 211.

She was aware now of her danger. This was no liberal soft-hearted judge she faced, not one to be cozened by a clever wording of her plea or impressed by the fact that she had spent most of her life in dutiful service to the Travel-bureau without ever a hint of laxness in her duties. Her hair, shot with white from the constant and unpredictable strains of space duty, was not going to touch him, nor were the deep-etched lines in her face that marked her instantly as a Seeker.... She could imagine his reaction, if her attorney tried using those marks in her favor.

"This woman knew the dangers that accompany the profession of Space Seeker before she entered it, and freely chose it nonetheless. The effect those dangers may have had on her person is irrelevant to the disposition of this case," he would say. Yes. That is precisely how he would put it.

She shuddered, and the Fedro-bot beside her reacted at once; before she could dodge its graymetal extensor, she felt the brief, chill sting of the tranquilizing injection. And knew then how tired she was.... Space Seekers did not go around betraying their emotions and weaknesses, not if they wanted to live through their term of service.

The judge was speaking now,

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outlining the charge carefully for the benefit of the one thousand jurors watching the proceedings in their homes. It was a grave offense, etc., etc. Her long years of service were no excuse; they were in fact a point against her, since she could not plead ignorance or lack of experience, etc., etc. No mitigating circumstances had been brought to his attention, although of course the prisoner would be allowed to speak in her own defense, etc., etc. Et cetera.

The drug was apparently a good one, because when she broke into his recital with her protest, her voice was absolutely calm.

"Citizen Judge," she said, reasonably, quietly, "please do remind them also what a *small* change it was."

He thundered at her. She had heard of judges "thundering" — it was a standard cliche of second-rate threedy plots — but he really did. His voice made her head ache and her ears ring.

"There is no such thing as a 'small' change, citizens," he shouted, "no such thing! Turn over one pebble on an alien world, break one flowerstem, leave behind one grain of sand from one of our home-worlds, and the changes never stop! You, prisoner, you know that! You, an experienced Seeker, you know full well that there is no change so small that it does not lead to a second, and that one to a third, and that one on and on in a chain of change...." His voice dropped suddenly, sleet now instead of thunder, and he said what she expected him to say. *"We do not tamper with the evolution of an alien world. Ever!"*

He didn't need to tell them. They knew. The children had a jump-rope rhyme....

"Leave that alien world alone,
Don't bring back that dinosaur bone,
Alien space and alien time,
None of your business and none of mine!"

Well. She sighed, since there was nothing to do. She could see, as if they were before her, all those jurors, with their fingers already poised to push the GUILTY button on their comsets; and her eyes flickered to the panel above the judge's head where those thousand lights would flash the deep purple of condemnation ... all one thousand of them, she was willing to bet. And soon.

They woud be right, of course, as the judge was right. She *had* known better. She was no novice, leaving a stray hair behind from a morning's brushing or bringing back a submicroscopic "souvenir." She had violated the primary law of the Travelbureau, she had done it deliberately and knowingly, and she was guilty as charged. The only thing uncertain about this trial was

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how harsh the sentence would be, and she had a strong feeling that it would be the maximum allowed. The attorney beside her was working, all its small dials and indicators glowing and humming, but it was saying nothing at all. It would have searched the computer banks all the way back to the first case of this kind ever brought before a court; if it had found anything, any precedent that could have helped her in any way, it would be citing that case and quoting the relevant material from the microbrief at this moment. It was as silent as the jury-panel, which meant that it was all up to her. It would protect her rights, it would object if anything out of order began to happen in the courtroom, but it had nothing to offer in her defense.

"The prisoner will step forward," the judge said at last, having apparently run out of damning things to tell the jurors, "and will present her own account of the circumstances of this crime."

How far forward?

"How far —"

"You will move to the X before the judge's bench," her attorney said. "You will stand precisely on the center of the X and face the judge. You will speak clearly, so that you can be heard by the jurors." CLICK.

The Fedrobot, which was programmed for maximum efficiency in matters like these, nudged her elbow, and she stepped up as instructed, but she had no idea what she was going to say.

What was she going to tell this icy judge? And all those waiting people? That the air had been soft and warm on the alien planet when she set down, scented with flowers and grasses, that something about it had reminded her of her home-planet? That there had been a bird singing in a passion of moonlight, out on the branch of a tree very like the trees outside the house where she had lived as a child, except that its leaves were the wrong color?

"You will speak now," said the attorney behind her, sounding faintly and metallically worried. "It is rude to delay the court."

"I don't know how to begin," she said, that being the simple truth.

"Begin at the beginning, continue through the middle, and stop at the end," snapped the judge. "Give us a clear and concise account of the facts of this disgraceful matter and be done with it. There are other matters awaiting the attention of this court, you know."

"I —"

"Begin at once!" he bellowed. "And provide us with a proper report!"

"Objection," said the attorney. "The judge is bullying the prisoner."

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"Sustained," said the judge, looking bored. "Now proceed. Please."

"Thank you, Citizen Judge," she said. "I will not try the court's patience unduly."

"Noted," he said. "And appreciated."

"I have been on a total of forty-three Seeker missions for the Travelbureau," she began, "and have seen many alien civilizations. Some were very poor, some plunged in savagery. Some were suffering from diseases, from brutal rulers, from wars, from the catastrophes of nature or of their own technology. Others—"

"Citizen," the judge broke in, "if we were interested in the story of your life, we would watch it on the threedies. Spare us."

"Objection!" said the attorney. "The judge is speaking sarcastically to the prisoner."

"Overruled. The prisoner will continue, with less drama and more facts, or sarcasm will be the least of her problems."

A certain stubbornness was beginning to surface through the apathy and weariness that she felt. She had always had a low tolerance for bullies, and this judge was a megabully.

"But never," she said, as if he had not spoken, "never have I seen anything like what I saw on this planet. You may think, Citizen Judge, that out of *your* vast experience you have become well acquainted with misery, but I tell you that what I saw will surpass anything you have ever encountered before. And *I saw* it, face to face; I did not simply listen to it being talked about."

"Talk about it anyway. Be specific. What sort of misery?"

"It was a planet of beings almost like ourselves," she said, remembering how easy it had been to move among them unobserved, "almost exactly like us. A people of great potential. But every one of them was afflicted. Crippled, with multiple handicaps."

"Describe their condition."

"They —"

"I warn you, now, no emotionalism!"

"Can you imagine a planet on which every single individual is almost completely deaf and blind?" she asked him softly. "Every single one, without exception?"

"No. I cannot. Nor do I believe you."

The attorney shot a brilliant blue flare over her head, right into the face of the judge and the multiple eyes of the jurypanel. "Objection!" it said at its peak volume. "Objection! The prisoner is telling the truth."

"Hmmmmph."

"Objection!"

"Oh ... sustained," muttered

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the judge. "Go on with it."

"The judge will apologize to the prisoner," said the attorney. "Her rights have been violated and her credibility questioned."

His lips tightened and his nostrils quivered with rage, but he apologized.

"And now," he said, "could we please be favored with a simple account of the *facts?* You are a scientist, citizen. Report."

"On that planet," she said briskly, hands clasped behind her in her best reporting manner, "there lives a race which can see *only* light rays, and then only in the electromagnetic spectrum range from about 400 millimicrons to slightly more than 700. To everything else, from the gamma rays to the other end of the spectrum — which, I remind you, is at one million *meters,* Citizen Judge — they are completely blind. They do not see even the ultraviolet or infrared rays on either side of the narrow band they call 'sight.'"

"Which means?"

"That they cannot see the angels all about them," she said. "That they cannot see the spirits of the water or of the plants or of the other living things indigenous to their planet. That they cannot see the paths of rays that lead out across space and time. That they cannot see beyond the fraction of time in which they believe themselves to be trapped and which they call the 'present.' That they see, in fact, little more than shadows and blurs.... Citizen Judge, with all due respect, only the smallest fraction of the natural phenomena of their own world are visible to them — that fraction necessary for survival. Can you imagine what their life must be like?"

He was silent, which she took for a good sign, and she went on.

"As for their hearing, they hear nothing except in that barren band between 20 cycles and 20 thousand cycles per second; that is less than the perceptual capacity of a neysa-flower on this world. They cannot hear their own trees singing, Citizen Judge. They believe that the plants are silent; they have no idea that the rain speaks to them; they hear the voices of their rivers and oceans as a kind of ... noise. They say, Citizen Judge, that the ocean 'roars.'"

The voice of the judge had lost *its* roar. It could almost be said to be quavering — almost.

"But the ocean," he said, "the living waters of our worlds — they tell us our history. They instruct us in the ancient knowledge that is the heart of our culture."

"Not on that planet," she said firmly. "Those beings, who, I tell you, could walk among us and scarcely draw attention, hear the voices of the waters as a kind of

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hissing noise. Nothing more."

The judge stared at her, his brows hunching over his nose, and spoke directly to her attorney.

"Has this prisoner been examined by a Truth-Sensor?" he demanded.

"Yes, Citizen Judge," said the attorney.

"Has she been examined by a psychiatric computer? Has she been pronounced sane? After all, the strain of so many missions has undoubtedly been great; it would not be unreasonable if her mind had suffered some damage. In which case, attorney, she should not be before this court but in a hospital."

The attorney began to click fiercely, outraged to the limits of its thinking functions. It took it almost thirty seconds to regain control; whereupon it announced loudly that it was a Model 3740-Gamma Attorney, of the very highest quality, and that it was not likely to come into court with a client who had not been thoroughly screened in every way demanded by the law. It announced its displeasure in no uncertain terms and threatened to demand a mistrial declaration.

The judge was taken aback, she could see that. What it might mean for her she didn't know, but he was taken aback. He spoke to her then, almost gently.

"On any of our worlds," he said, "even on the frontier asteroids, such creatures would be institutionalized."

"Yes. That is correct."

"But on this planet you describe.... They move about freely, alone. They have no guides."

"No."

"They have developed auxiliary perceptions, then," he said suddenly. "Smell, touch, perhaps, are vastly overdeveloped to compensate for these other handicaps. Or their psi-senses serve to provide them information in place of their sight and hearing!"

"No!" She shook her head and realized that her fingernails were digging into the palms of her clenched fists. If only she could make him imagine, as she had actually *seen,* living beings, a world of them, so pitifully handicapped that even the smallest one-celled deyba organism in a cup of pond water could perceive more of the glory of the universe than they could.

"Their so-called 'senses' of smell, taste, touch," she said bitterly, "are almost nonexistent. I did not think them worth mentioning here. They can neither see nor hear with their fingertips, they have only gross sensory concepts such as 'hot' and 'cold' and 'rough' and 'sticky' ... like retarded infants. As for psi-senses!"

She laughed harshly, and even through the drug she felt her hands

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tremble. She leaned forward and willed the man to perceive clearly what she would never be able to erase from her mind's eye.

"Citizen Judge," she said, "they do not even know that the psi-senses exist. They have myths about such things ... they call them 'fairy-tales.'"

"Which means?"

She bit her lip, feeling helpless. Linguistics was not her field.

"Objection," said her attorney. "The accused is not a linguist. One can be brought before the court, if the judge desires."

"Never mind," said the judge, "never mind. It doesn't matter anyway. If the prisoner says these creatures exist, and live — if it can be called life — then it must be so. If she were lying, the Truth-Sensor would have known. If she were hallucinating, the psychiatric computer would have spotted it. What she describes, repulsive as it is, must therefore be true."

She opened her mouth to speak, but stopped at his lifted hand.

"I must instruct the jurors at this point," he said, looking straight over her head, "that all of this in no way changes the situation. However moved they may be — and they properly should be — by the description the prisoner has just given us of these creatures, nothing we have heard so far has constituted a mitigating circumstance. The crime *remains a crime;* there can be no justification for interfering in the evolution of an alien race. The jurors must keep this firmly in their minds as the prisoner continues with her testimony."

And then he was leaning over to look at her, his eyes as hard as the pebbles he had said must not be turned over, ever, and he was saying: "We have heard enough of the details, citizen. I cannot conceive of the situation you describe, nor, I am sure, can any of the jurors, but we accept the statements you have made as fact. Any further elaboration would be — morbid. Pornography for the sensation-starved. *I* am not one of those, citizen."

"Objection," her attorney began. "The judge is implying —"

"Silence!" The judge was clearly at the end of his limited patience. "The prisoner will describe her crime, with no further dramatics from either herself or her attorney, or I will clear this court forthwith and begin again tomorrow. Proceed!"

The Space Seeker looked down at the floor, knowing now that there was no hope for her, and she told him. How she had landed in a deep ravine in an area the inhabitants called "Mizura." How all about her in the little towns she had seen people, sitting outside their dwellings on projections called "porches,"

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something like kelasiths, sitting in "rocking chairs."

"What?"

She said it again and explained. A piece of furniture, with curved pieces attached to its legs. Almost every house had had at least one, and after dark, people would sit out on the "porches" and they would "rock."

"And?"

And she had had her Shaper with her, like any other Space personnel. The Shaper's weight was less than the weight of a feather, and because it shared the space of any construct—

"We do know the characteristics of the creature known as a Shaper," the judge said coldly. "It is able to move between the energy particles of any constructed artifact and thus takes no observable space and almost no measurable weight. It is telepathic; it is empathic; it is bred specifically for a compulsion to devotion; it makes an ideal companion on long voyages. Even children know this. You need not instruct us in elementary zoology, citizen."

"I am sorry."

"Tell us what you did with *your* Shaper. That will, I hope, be more relevant."

"I just left it," she said, "in a 'rocking chair' that happened to be empty at the time."

"And?"

"And I instructed it to reproduce."

"Knowing that a Shaper can produce thousands of its own kind in a single cycle!"

"Knowing that, yes," she said doggedly. "And I instructed it, very carefully, to enter no other construct *whatsoever. Nothing,* except the 'rocking chairs.'"

"In which," spat the judge, "by your own admission, the inhabitants of that planet spend long hours of their time!"

She said nothing, because there wasn't anything to say, but she thought about it, and the corners of her lips twitched in spite of herself. Each time one of those pitiful creatures sat down to 'rock,' it would share, suddenly, all the perceptions of the Shaper. Not the perceptions of a *person,* of course, but still ... more, so infinitely much more than had ever been available to them before. They would not see the pathways stretching into space and time; they would not hear the chiming of their Sun. But they would hear the angels sing, and see the spirits of the roses and the wheat, and they would hear the voice of their broad brown river, telling them of their beginnings and of the intricate workings of their world.

The judge caught his breath and struck the bench with his fist. "I must instruct the jurors," he said viciously, "and instruct them

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to give it great weight in their deliberations, that the prisoner is *smiling!* She stands before this court, accused of a crime second only to treason ... and on her face, at this very moment, shameless as any common criminal, citizens, is a *smile!* The prisoner is utterly without remorse, my friends."

And he leaned over to ask her — "Is that not true, citizen?"

Her attorney was instructing her to say nothing, to be silent, to do nothing, to wait, wait, wait; but she didn't care. She knew a lost cause when she was one.

She looked straight into the judge's eyes and said in a voice as full of contempt as his own: "I would do it again tomorrow."

The judge was so furious he could scarcely call for the verdict, and the jurypanel above him blazed purple, without a single golden light to mar its majesty.

"Guilty as charged!" he shouted, almost as purple as the lights above him. "Guilty as charged! And the sentence is ... fifty years in the prison of Parradyne-X. *Next case!*"

Leroy Henderson's furniture store in Tiger Branch, Missouri, was not any major business enterprise. Around Christmastime, Leroy would sell a lot of those little whatnots women used for setting out gewgaws on. When somebody got married, it happened from time to time that instead of going in to St. Louis after their furniture they would get some of it at Henderson's. Leroy got by, but just barely.

Until this year. He had never seen anything like it in his life.

"Mary Alma," he said at supper, "I've never seen anything like it in my life."

"Like what, Leroy?"

Mrs. Henderson set three biscuits on her husband's plate and pushed the tomato preserves his way. Leroy liked his biscuits, and he liked her to keep them coming.

"Well..." Leroy considered a minute, and then he said, "Well, would you please explain to me how a town that can hardly manage to feed itself from one day to the next has suddenly gone stark ravin' crazy over rockin' chairs?"

"Rocking chairs, Leroy?" She pushed the butter closer, too.

"Damn right. I sold thirteen last week, and twenty some odd this week, and I called the warehouse in Hannibal to order twenty more, and bedamned if they don't tell me it's like that all over and it'll be maybe a month before they can send me an order. Did you ever hear tell of anything like that?"

Mary Alma made clucking noises, which was all that was expected of her.

"Eat your dinner, Leroy," she said pleasantly, "and don't look a

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gift horse in the mouth."

If she could hurry him along a bit, she'd have time to sit on the front porch and rock for a good hour between clearing up the kitchen and time for bed. Leroy would go watch the television, which he claimed broadened the mind.

As for her, she was just going to sit there

and rock.

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If you are considering putting an aging relative in a nursing home, perhaps you had better read this story first. Its author writes that he has had stories in Harper's *and* Viva *and recently had a novel,* Too Late, *published by Harper & Row.*

A Home Away From Home

by STEPHEN DIXON

Downstairs, his father was watching TV. Ray was in his room upstairs trying to keep his eyes open and his mind from wandering, as there were still lots of things to take care of before he flew back to California.

His father had to be put in a nursing home, that was the main thing. The old man was ailing, incontinent, periodically incoherent, in constant need of attention, and his condition was getting even worse. It'd be ridiculous taking his father to San Diego with him, as Ray's house was too small and he knew they'd be at each other's throats the day they got there.

Ray was tired of taking care of his dad. He'd done it for a month now, after a neighbor had phoned him and said his father was too feeble to stay by himself anymore. He was tired of changing his bed daily, emptying and scouring his urinals and setting them strategically around the house, tucking him into bed so he wouldn't fall out and waking, showering, drying and dressing him and sticking two eggs in boiling water for three minutes when his father wanted them scrambled in chicken fat or at least fried sunnyside up. He had only put off placing him in a home because the old man had begged, pleaded, "I'd get down on my knees if I could to stop you," blubbered real tears as he said, "Just another week, Ray. Wait till the Sunday after next, Ray." Always the stall. And last night he said that if he were sent to a home he'd die in a week's time. "I know it, sure as I'm sitting here watching TV."

Ray went downstairs. "Pop? I'd like to speak to you."

"Speak to me later. Ted Soloman's got a good show on tonight."

"This is more important than

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Soloman. I've got to be getting back to California."

"When?" He pressed the remote-control gadget in his lap, and the TV sound was shut off. "You going back tomorrow? Good. Tonight? Even better. Not that I won't miss you. But it'll be nice having the house alone for a change," and he turned the TV sound back on. A comedian was still talking about his wife and freeloading brother-in-law.

"Now this mooch," the comedian said, and his father laughed, "is such a sponge on me that just yesterday...."

"I'm not going back tonight. Things have to be settled first. Number one, we've got to discuss that nursing home."

"What nursing home?" The comedian became a raving mute again, right on a major punch line. "You going to work in one in California?"

"You're going to a home — now you know that. It simply depends when. You've got to realize that I teach in San Diego, and I'm losing all my paid sick days for ten years."

"You sick? Take some of my medicine then. Got more than I can use in two lifetimes, those thieving doctors."

"I spoke to the nursing home administrator today. He says they've a waiting list a mile long — that's how well-respected and popular this home is."

"Popular because it's cheap."

"It's not cheap. I'll be paying more for you there than I would at Grossinger's Hotel."

"Then send me to Grossinger's. There I'd at least get to meet interesting people and eat good, filling food. And what a choice. You ever see the menu they got up there?"

"The food's supposed to be excellent at the home also. And this Mr. Kramer, the administrator, told me —"

"Better food than at the Concord, Grossinger's has. That's a fact. Been to both resorts, and Grossinger's is absolutely the best. I only wish you were in the resort business."

"So do I. It'd be a nice healthy life."

"Healthy life, my eye. Money. You'd make money. Piles of it, though you'd probably have your first stroke by the time you're forty. And with three college degrees, those guests would give you twice the respect you get from your junior high school delinquents."

"Junior college."

"Whatever, but you won't listen to me. You never have. So what d'you say you let me watch some entertainment," and he switched on the TV.

"This Mr. Kramer," Ray

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shouted over the ad, "well, he says he's held your bed as long as he can. That if you don't take it in two days, we'll have to give it up. That I'll have to forfeit my two hundred dollar deposit besides, and he doesn't see the prospect of another vacancy for two months."

"Somebody'll die before then. Old people always do, especially in nursing homes."

"Listen, it took me two weeks — will you shut that damn thing off?" The television went dead. "Two weeks of constant badgering to finally get you this bed, and I don't want to give it up. I promised mom I'd see you were well taken care of, and this is the best way I know how."

His father looked sad, then indignant. "What're you always going on about your poor mom for? Is it you want me to think about death?" Ray shook his head. "Well you're successful at it, even if before it never enters my mind, close as some people say I am to it. All I know is that death's my world's worst enemy — but you? It's always on your mind, day and night."

"I didn't know I was upsetting you."

"Worse than that, you're a depressing joke. Okay, we both loved her. But she's dead and buried now and we're left here alive with each other. So let her rest in peace."

"Fine. Now let's get back to what you're going to do. The only solution left is for you to try the home for a month. If you don't like it, I'll find you a place more comfortable."

"You're a liar? For saying you'd fly East just to make me more comfortable? Once I'm in a home, you'll forget me for life, just as you forgot to invite me to California."

"If you mean the homes there, you wouldn't like them. You'd leave in a week, it gets so hot."

"You don't want me out there because you don't want me around, period. That's okay. You're no bargain yourself. But if that Hudson River home you got lined up for me is so important to you, have them hold it for two more weeks. If it's not too difficult to understand, I just want a last two weeks alone by myself here and then I'll go."

"Impossible."

"Why? Just leave, that's all. Get Mrs. Long down the street to look in on me twice a day and I'll be okay. So I mess up the house a little — big deal. Then in two weeks I'll go to the home, but my own way. No help. Nothing. Just me in a cab with nobody around to make a big fuss over me. Then the realty people can sell the house, the junk people can have the furniture, and with the money you get from

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them you can help pay for the nursing home. My own Social Security should take care of the rest."

"You serious?"

And he said, "Serious as anything. Move my bed near the john and I'll be all right. When I want groceries or something, I'll phone. Is it a deal? Because believe me, it's the only one I'll make."

Next day, Ray called Mr. Kramer and asked if he'd hold his father's bed two more weeks.

"Can't," Kramer said. "Those beds are too scarce as it is. And I'm not getting a dime for yours, and I've at least ten families hounding me to put their fathers here for the rest of his life. What better offer could you give me than that?"

"My father will also be there for the rest of his life. And he's a very amiable man who won't give your staff the slightest trouble."

"All my patients are amiable, Mr. Barrett. I've no complaints: they're all dolls. But you have to have that bed occupied by tomorrow, or it's off my reserve list, and you lose your deposit, I'm sorry."

Ray arranged for Mrs. Long to look in on his father for the next two weeks. That afternoon, after seeing that the refrigerator was full and a bed set up near the downstairs john, he kissed his father good-by and trained to the small New York town overlooking the Hudson where the nursing home was. He greeted Kramer in his office, said how glad he was to meet him after speaking with him on the phone these last weeks, and asked to see his father's bed.

"You want to inspect it before he comes, that it? Well, right this way. It's really heartening to see such a devoted son," and he led Ray up the stairs.

"There it is," Kramer said. "Even from the corridor you can see how much cheerful sun it gets."

Ray walked into the room, said hello to the three patients there, and sat on the one empty bed. He kicked off his shoes, stretched out on the mattress, and told Kramer that for the next two weeks he was going to occupy this bed. "I made a deal. And if you'll hold on for a minute and not get so hysterical, I'm sure I can make you understand."

"So how are things looking for you today?"

Ray opened his eyes. It was Mrs. Beets, an 82-year-old resident from the next room, nudging his shoulder.

"Fine thanks, and you?"

"Terrible. My palsy will kill me worse. You want to see how bad my hand shakes?"

"I was sort of taking a nap."

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"Naps you can always take, but my hand here's shaking worse than even yesterday. I think it ought to be photographed for posterity by a TV news show, just so young people can see how fast a human hand can shake."

"Leave him alone, Beetie." It was Mr. Potter from the next bed. He was 76 and on his back all day, as he had recently had one of his legs removed because of some rare bone disease.

"I was only showing him my hand."

"Show it to the marines," Pot ter said, and after she left the room, saying she had a painting class to attend anyway, Potter raised himself a few inches and said, "Never saw such a bad palsy case in my ten years here. But admit it to her once and she'd never leave us alone. Sleep well?"

"So-so."

"Well, sleep, go on, don't let me bother you. Man's best healer, sleep." And after Ray felt himself dozing off again: "What about your stomach? Acting up again?"

"It was never acting up, Mr. Potter."

"And the sugar in your blood. Very important, you know."

"It's perfect. On my honor."

"How can you be sure? Check. You always got to check. You take a urine sample this morning?"

"As I told you when I got here, I'm only holding this bed for my father."

"Why doesn't he come visit you, your old man. Shame on him. Son in a filthy home like this and your dad doesn't visit? Once you're here, they always forget about you. Now if you were my son."

"If he was your son," Mr. Burnside, another patient in the room, said, "you wouldn't have to come visit him. He'd always be in the bed right beside you, talking and dreaming of his pretty ladies."

"That'd be nice," Potter said. "My family always around."

"What you say?" Burnside said. "Can't understand you. Put your teeth back in your mouth, Potter."

"I said it'd be nice having my whole family around. Just like the ancient Chinese."

"What? You reminiscing again? Well, wake me up when you're through, as I've heard it all." He shut his eyes, and between snores asked anyone to wake him when the dinner cart rolled around. "I'm starving, though who can eat the garbage they give us here."

"I like the garbage," Potter told Ray. "Doesn't give me heartburn, which Mr. Burnside should appreciate the value of. He's had four major coronaries and is working on number five, because you see the way he sneaks the salt

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shaker from under his pillow and sprinkles it on his food like it was air?"

"So I push off tonight or a week from now," Burnside said. "Isn't anyone outside who'd care except maybe the Welfare chap who checks up on me here, and him you can have on a silver platter. That's why I sleep so much. When the end comes, let it during a beautiful dream."

"He's got nobody," Potter whispered. "You at least got a father and a good future in San Francisco, right?"

"San Diego."

"Mr. Hidago knows all about California also. Did you once live near San Diego, Mr. Hidago?"

"You joshing me?" Hidago said from under the sheet, as he never showed his face. "I was in L.A. — literally nearer the North Pole." He was the youngest official patient in the room — 68, and up until a few months ago, if Ray could believe everything Hidago said from under the covers, he'd been a man about town, "a gadabout with two young floozies pinned to my arms, dinner every night at Sardi's or the 21, and still a big-time Broadway operator and heavy backer of movies and shows." But his Fifth Avenue apartment caught fire with him in it, most of his body had been burned, and he had sworn never to let anyone see his body and face except professional people — "Doctors and maybe a few of the prettier nurses, but that's all."

"Come on, Hidago," Burnside said. "Throw off the wrapper and tell us about those beautiful young dollies in Hollywood."

"I can't. You want to see a body of just scarred tissue? And I used to be such a handsome rake. With a full head of hair and a big chest and powerful ticker and still able to get it up when I wanted to with the most exquisite and demanding showgirls. Now look at me."

"So I'm looking," Burnside said, "but all I can see is a big lump under a sheet. Come on, Hidago, show us that thing you used to dazzle your showgirls with."

"Never." He burrowed himself deeper under the sheets. "Not today, tomorrow, or in a million years."

"You should live so long," and Burnside went back to sleep.

"They should get Mr. Hidago a private room or curtains," Potter said. "But every time he asks, they say they will, and then you never hear of it again. You should've gotten into one of those nicer homes I hear about in California, Ray. There they treat you like a golden-ager should."

"Food, everybody." It was

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Mrs. Peterman, one of the nurse's aides. She was a sometimes exuberant, though usually ill-tempered woman whose good spirits depended on how much vodka she consumed before starting work. But most of the male patients liked having her around. Liquored up or not, she told the raunchiest jokes possible, for a little extra charge gave them a squeeze and rub in the right places every so often, and allowed them to smear forbidden mayonnaise on their bread and douse their food with as much salt as they wanted.

"So how are you today, people?" she said.

"Sleeping soundly," Burnside said.

"And I'm not quite ready to sit up," Hidago said, "so could you please slip my tray through the hole I made in the sheet?"

"No chance. Today, good friend, you're seeing the light."

"Leave him be," Potter said. "It's his business if he doesn't want to come out."

"But God's own handiwork is out there for his viewing," she said, pointing to the cemented parking lot and the home's other wing. "Not only that, the doctor ordered it."

"What doctor? I'm on to your games, so name me names."

"Doctor Gerontology, that's who. He said: 'Mrs. Peterman, I think it'd be beneficial today to have people see Mr. Hidago, and Mr. Hidago to face up to people seeing him,' though naturally I can't tell you the doctor's name. Professional courtesy and all that," and she placed a tray of food in front of Potter and then tapped Hidago through the sheets. "You coming out, sweetie?"

"If you insist on seeing me," Hidago said, "put a screen around the bed."

"Now enough dillydallying, Mr. Hidago. First of all, all the screens are in the new wing. Secondly, I'm a mother of six and saw to my own sweet parents till they were in their nineties. So it's not as though I don't know how to handle people. Now do I have to count to three? All right, then: one."

"I said leave him be," Potter said. "He's got a bum heart and everything that goes with it. Lay off or I'll report your drinking habits to Kramer's office. You're drunk even now."

"You think they don't know? They encourage it, in fact. Drinking and taking drugs are the two professional hazards that all hospitals accept from their personnel, because how else you think we could stand the sight of so many crotchety old men? Two."

"Have a heart, Mrs. Peterman," Ray said. "If Mr.

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Hidago doesn't want to come out, respect that wish."

"You, Mr. Barrett, should think better to mind your business. Talking about disgraces, you're the worst. Occupying a bed that should rightfully belong to a senescent is one of the most despicable crimes against human nature a person could do. To me, you don't even exist."

"I'll be occupying it for one more week. Then my father gets it."

"Listen to that lie. You're running away from the world, that's what you're doing. Or maybe writing an expose for some scandal magazine. We're on to you — the whole staff. We all think you're a misfit," and she swiveled around to Hidago, yelled "Three," and flung the sheets off him. When they first saw his horribly scarred body — his gloved hands clasped to his eyes and a scream so tight in his throat no sound emerged — everyone in the room but Mrs. Peterman had to turn away.

"Get a doctor," Burnside said. "My heart. My heart can't stand such a sight."

Mrs. Peterman made sure everyone had had a good look at Hidago and then daintily recovered him. "Now that wasn't so terrible," she said. "The truth is, you don't look half so bad as you think. It's all in your mind, sweet. Because nobody here hardly winced at you except for Mr. Burnside, and you know what an old fuddy-duddy he is, besides being a great one for a practical joke. Take it from me: what I did was therapy. And now that everyone's seen you, how about coming out on your own accord and eating these nice goodies?"

Hidago didn't move. After a while Mrs. Peterman said how her curiosity just seemed to get the better of her at times and lifted the sheets off Hidago, though held them up in front of her so nobody else could see him. She let the sheets float back on him, turned to Potter and said, "Know what? I think the poor guy's dropped dead on us."

Ray phoned his father three days later. He said the two weeks were up and told him to have Mrs. Long pack his bags and drive him to the home so he could take over the bed. But his father said he didn't know if he was ready to go to the home yet. "Why don't you fly back to California, Ray, and let me work things out myself."

"If I leave now, I not only lose the deposit, but they'll take the bed away from us also, and then where will we be? No place. It'll be months before I find you another home. Believe me, if I had the strength, I'd come and get you

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and, if need be, carry you here myself."

"You feeling sick?"

"Why do you say that?"

"Your voice. It's weak. And this business about your strength."

"That was just a figure of speech, and all I have is a little cold."

"Well, take care of yourself. The extra week's rest will do your cold good, and then I'll be there to take over the bed."

Ray hadn't told him that he felt Hidago's death had in some way started the decline of his own health. He'd never seen a dead man before, not even in the army. He lost ten pounds in a week and, for unknown reasons to the staff and himself, he wasn't able to hold down any solids. And Mr. Lurie, the patient who now had Hidago's bed, was screaming again, just as he screamed through half of every day and night, till Ray told himself that he'd had it here for good. He threw off the covers, said, "Let my father find his own home if he wants, but I'm getting out," and jumped off the bed, but crumpled to the floor. Nothing was going to stop him from leaving though, and he stood up but his legs collapsed again. Potter rang for an aide, who put Ray back to bed. At first Ray thought it was the flu. There was a bug going around the home, though he'd never heard of a flu that made his hands tremor and his up-till-then perfect eyesight so astigmatic that he had to be fitted for thick corrective lens. When the doctor made his rounds next day, Ray asked if anything more serious than the flu could be making him feel so ill.

"If you were thirty years older," the doctor said, "I'd say your illness was only another common geriatric problem that someone your advanced age had to accept. But you're 33, if your records are correct; so all I can say is your condition is caused by some minor, though unique fluke in your metabolism, and it won't be long before you're feeling as healthy as a man your age should."

The following day, the barber came around for the patients' monthly haircuts. As he snipped Ray's hair, he asked if Ray wanted any of the gray touched up.

"What gray hairs? I've got as many as you got fingers. Just finish the trim."

"You patients here," the barber said. "You're all as vain as the high school Casanovas I cut," and he held up a mirror to Ray's face. Not only was his hair partially gray on the sides and top, but lines had opened up on his neck and forehead that a 45 to 50 year old man didn't have. Ridiculous, he thought, when he considered that

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just two months ago he'd been so youthful-looking that other teachers on the campus had often mistaken him for one of their students.

Every day after that, he studied the increasing graying and thinning of his hair, the ditches in his forehead and neck, and the crow's-feet at his eyes which seemed to get deeper and more numerous. And every day he phoned his father, who was less inclined than ever to go to the home.

"I've been getting reports about you," his father said, his voice more resonant than Ray had heard it in years. "From Mr. Kramer, who says you're an unruly patient and giving everyone there a rough time. That isn't like you, Ray. Place getting you down?"

"Of course it is. And, believe me, I'd be on the next plane for California if it wasn't for this damn flu."

"Flu? Before it was just a cold. You got to be more careful with yourself."

"Flu, eye trouble, maybe the beginning of ulcers and a urological disorder — I'm not kidding you, pop. But once I'm better, I'm leaving here, with or without the deposit, and then you'll have to find your own nursing home."

"Fine with me, because I'm feeling so good I think I might not need a home after all. Fact is, I've never felt better in my life. Would you like me to visit you?"

"How? If you spend all your energy getting here, then make sure it's when you're coming to stay."

His father showed up the next morning, looking better than Ray had seem him in ten years. He'd lost weight, his face was tan and rugged, even his spirits had improved tremendously, and with him was this very pretty young woman in her late twenties, whom he introduced to Ray as Ms. Amby Wonder.

"Amby, meet Raymond."

"How do you do?" she said, extending her hand. "Any friend of Barry's is a friend of mine."

"Friend? This is my son. Raymond Barrett —don't you remember?'

"Oh, yeah. Pleased to meet you, Raymond. Any friend of Barry's is a —"

"Who's Barry?" Ray said.

"Why, your daddy, most certain. Barry for Barrett. Isn't that what everybody calls him?"

"Who is this woman, pop, your nurse?"

"You won't believe this, Ray," and his father moved closer so Amby wouldn't hear, "but she's my girl."

"You mean your daughter? Someone not from momma?"

"Girl like in woman. You

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don't understand?" Standing straight again, he looked two inches taller than when Ray used to walk him to bed and tuck him in. And the clothes he was wearing — right out of a stylish men's shop. Ray wondered what had happened to the old man. Maybe it was some special rejuvenative pills he was taking, and asked his father about it.

"Great stuff, those — you want my doc to prescribe you some? Take two after rising and four before bedtime, and whoopee!" and he twirled around twice and squeezed Amby into his body.

"Pop, you're embarrassing me," Ray said, glancing at Potter.

"That's your problem: too self-conscious. But listen, it's not just the pills. It's my new disposition. Mrs. Long suggested sending a psychiatrist over, and in just five sessions he straightened me out fine. Said 'Throw away your sadness and walker and get yourself a piece of ass,' and that's what I did. But you?"

"What about me?"

"Your scalp, for one thing." He ran his hand through Ray's hair. "Even I got more than you."

"It's from the flu. But it'll all grow back."

"And that pretty red color your hair used to have? That'll grow back too?"

"I've been worrying a lot lately, but a little gray won't kill me."

"I still don't like it. Ailments, balding. I think you should be in a real hospital. Want me to admit you to one?"

"I'll be okay, I said. In a few days I'll be up and out, and then it's good-by New York forever."

"I'm glad, because you can really use that California sun. As for Amby and me, we'll be getting some sun also. In Brazil. If you're really not feeling that sick, then we'll be flying there tomorrow."

"You crazy? Pills, psychiatrists or whatever therapy you're taking — they still can't keep you going forever. You're committing suicide. You should take it easy — rest, like me."

"Let him go to Brazil if he wants," Amby said. "His doctors say he's healthy as a horse, and you should be happy to see him have fun."

"Don't give me that junk, young lady," Ray said. "I don't know how much dough you're planning to embezzle from him, but I think you should know first that he has a very serious heart condition."

"Heart condition?" and she laughed.

"And diabetes, liver trouble, the early symptoms of Parkinson's, plus a half dozen other less painful though equally enfeebling

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afflictions that most older people aren't even aware they have. He's an old man, if you must know the truth," and Amby kept on laughing, his father joining in with her. "His doctors said long ago that a person in his condition can barely stand the strain of walking, less any great globe-trotting with an adventurous young woman — a tramp."

"Now hold off, Ray. Amby's a fine young lady."

"She's an insidious conniving tramp who's going to ruin your life. So get her out of here — I can't stand her sight." His father pressed down on Ray's shoulder to restrain him, and with his other hand shooed Amby out of the room.

"Calm yourself, Ray. You're upset and tired, besides being ill. Just take it easy, and when we return to the States, we'll look in on you again, okay?"

"You're not going to find me here."

"Then in San Diego we'll come visit — but just take care."

"Don't bother visiting with her. I won't have you both out there."

"Anything you say. Now rest, just rest," and he put his hands over Ray's eyes, just as he used to do when Ray was a boy, so gently that Ray soon felt himself falling asleep. His father whispered goodby to the other patients and left the room.

"Dad?" Ray said a minute later, shocked out of sleep by a pain in his side and shoving himself to the window. "Dad," he shouted to his father hustling through the parking lot with Amby. "You're being used, fleeced, swindled by a pro. You've got to get out of her scheme quick before she takes you for every dime you own. Now you're coming back to San Diego with me when my illness is over, you hear? We'll take nice ocean walks, sit out in the sun, talk over good times, go out for nourishing dinners, and see all the better TV shows together. We'll take good care of one another is what I'm saying, and I'm going to have to insist on your coming, you understand? I said, do you understand? Goddamnit, Dad, you get so headstrong where you can't even listen to me anymore?"

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1 R	2 E	3 V	4 R	■	5 Y	6 S	7 U	■	8 Y	9 T
10 P	11 U	12 P	13 X	14 J	■	15 W	16 J	17 F	■	18 B
19 R	20 H	21 T	22 B	23 V	24 B	■	25 M	26 G	■	27 T
28 L	29 V	30 G	31 C	32 L	■	33 G	34 Y	35 K	36 O	37 T
38 B	39 F	■	40 M	41 R	42 Z	43 X	44 A	45 I	■	46 F
47 T	48 V	■	49 D	50 O	51 Q	52 R	53 N	■	54 R	55 J
56 W	57 X	■	58 M	59 I	60 P	61 T	62 K	63 T	64 Y	■
65 R	66 L	67 B	68 M	69 V	70 V	■	71 G	72 S	73 L	■
74 L	75 D	76 Y	77 H	78 A	79 B	80 R	■	81 I	82 O	■
83 Z	84 T	85 G	■	86 R	87 O	88 L	89 I	90 C	■	91 F
92 T	93 O	94 J	95 B	96 R	■	97 M	98 D	99 K	100 D	■
101 Y	102 I	103 C	104 Q	105 P	106 A	107 N	108 B	■	109 T	110 X
■	111 J	112 E	113 Y	■	114 T	115 M	116 W	117 A	118 G	119 Z
120 J	121 V	122 T	123 I	■	124 M	125 X	126 R	■	127 T	128 D
129 F	130 Z	■	131 D	132 M	■	133 V	134 Y	135 A	136 I	137 C
138 W	139 J	140 M	141 J	142 G	■	143 J	144 B	145 V	■	146 A
147 R	148 O	149 F	150 M	■	151 U	152 A	153 Q	154 Z	155 B	156 V
■	157 O	158 Y	159 H	160 T	161 P	■	162 U	163 B	164 S	■

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Acrostic Puzzle

by Peter D. Pautz

This puzzle contains a quotation from a science fiction story. First, guess the clues and write the word in the numbered blanks beside the clues. Put these letters in the matching blocks in the puzzle. (The end of the line is not necessarily the end of a word. Words end with black squares.) If your clue words are correct, you will see words forming in the puzzle blocks. If you can guess some of these words, put the letters into the blanks for the clues, over the appropriate numbers. This will help you to guess more words. The first letters of the correctly worked clues spell the name of the author and the title of the sf work from which the quotation is taken.

A. Sound of Harlan's flogged canines

135 152 44 146 117 78 106

B. "Where___?": 1st TWILIGHT ZONE (2 words)

163 79 22 155 95 67 38 18 144 108 24

C. Automobile nuts

137 31 103 90

D. Cthulhu whisperer

128 98 131 49 75 100

E. Sturgeon's moldy monster

112 2

F. Entree

46 91 149 17 129 39

G. Lot's House on the hill

33 118 142 30 71 85 26

H. Firkin

77 159 20

I. Bradbury's "Skeleton," for instance

81 136 45 89 59 102 123

J. "___Missing Ships": 1926 de Grandin story (3 words)

139 111 16 120 14 94 141 55 143

K. Buddhist sect

99 62 35

L. Thurston's or Hailey's

74 28 66 73 88 32

M. Dagon's skin disease

68 58 150 140 40 132 115 97 25 124

N. Compass point

53 107

O. William Henry Pratt

36 87 148 93 50 157 82

P. King's PENTHOUSE cliffhanger: "The___"

60 12 161 10 105

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Q. Wells's THE WAR OF THE WORLDS prelude: "The Crystal___"
153 104 51

R. 19th century French modern ghost writer (2 words)
96 126 86 147 19 4 41 1 65 52 —

54 80

S. Electrical resistance
6 72 164

T. OMEN's archaeologist (2 words)
114 92 27 61 109 9 63 160 47 84 —

127 21 37 122

U. Ruffian
151 162 7 11

V. "And don't forget the ___" Avram Davidson (3 words)
3 133 29 145 69 48 23 121 70 156

W. Jerky ocular motions
56 138 116 15

X. Owner of "The Animal Fair"
43 110 57 125 13

Y. Grant's sweet tree (2 words)
76 8 101 134 5 158 34 113 64

Z. His Holland was THE OTHER
83 42 154 130 119

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